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Anglo-Bulgarian Relations 1933-1941

Senior Honors Thesis

History 413

by

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Richmond, Virginia

March 5, 1999

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the confusing relations between Great Britain and Bulgaria in the years 1933-1941. These years serve as the focus because 1933 is when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in Germany and in 1941 Bulgaria entered World War II on the side of the Axis Powers. The newly rising threat of Germany, in the years after reconstruction from the First World War, is the backdrop against which these relations are set. This examination of the relations between Great Britain and Bulgaria shows why Britain failed to entice Bulgaria to join the Allied Powers, and why Bulgaria joined the Axis Powers.

The years from 1933 to 1941 have a special meaning to the men responsible for foreign policy in Great Britain and Bulgaria. The world witnessed the rebirth of a German threat to Europe; countries acted accordingly to protect and advance their interests. Great Britain again found itself, as in 1914, responsible for the defense of Europe against irredentist sentiments in a variety of countries. In such a position, Great Britain embarked on a campaign to recruit as many countries as possible in support of its position and opposing the Axis Powers. Bulgaria seemingly should have joined the struggle on the side of the Allied Powers, or at least remained neutral, remembering their catastrophic losses on the side of the Germans in World War I. King Boris III, ruler of Bulgaria 1918-1943, vowed as late as 1939 that Bulgaria would remain neutral throughout the conflict.¹ But Bulgaria did join the Axis Powers, and declared war on Great Britain in 1941. Why did Great Britain fail to insure Bulgarian support or neutrality in World War II? Studying the relations between these two countries will answer this question.

Before examining the countries themselves, and their relations with each other, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of important diplomatic events from 1918 to 1933. Great Britain's determination to maintain good diplomatic relations with France, and the latter's insecurities following World War I, led to the imposition of restrictive treaties on the defeated states of Germany, Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, and Turkey.² Italy sought formal recognition of occupied territory. Woodrow Wilson's obsession,

¹ Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918-1943* (Baltimore: Madison Books, 1987), 257.

² Graham Ross, *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System, 1914-1945* (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1983), 38.

creation of a League of Nations, allowed him to be manipulated into signing treaties he considered overly restrictive. Wilson also overestimated American influence in the peacemaking process.³ Most evident in the years following the end of the war and continuing into the 1930s is the tension and instability in Europe.

The Treaty of Versailles provided for a fifteen-year occupation of Germany's Rhineland, total German disarmament, temporary French control of the Saarland, return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the formation of a Polish Corridor, the infamous "war guilt" clause, and an amount in reparations to be specified later.⁴ The German military was limited to 100,000 men, and were allowed no air force, submarines, or tanks.⁵ French demands were moderated by the promise of future support from Great Britain and the United States in the event of another conflict with Germany. Conflicts over Japan's acquisition of the Shantung peninsula and Italian requests for the port of Fiume left both these powers dissatisfied with the final settlement.⁶ Bulgaria had lost the southern Dobrudja, a region comprised primarily of ethnic Bulgars, at the end of the second Balkan War. The Treaty of Neuilly, ending World War I, further deprived Bulgaria of western Thrace and several western border districts.⁷ These territories became the property of Greece and the newly formed Yugoslavia, respectively. Austria and Hungary

³ C. J Bartlett, *The Global Conflict: The International Rivalry of the Great Powers, 1880-1990*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1984), 111.

⁴ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 40.

⁵ Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 41.

⁶ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 41.

⁷ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 166.

became separate entities prior to the conclusion of the war, necessitating the Treaty of St. Germain with Austria and the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary. Austria was forbidden to join with Germany, and Hungary lost considerable lands to Romania and the new states of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.⁸ Great power spheres of influence were established in Turkey, under the Treaty of Sevres. All members of the losing side in World War I were subjected to stringent disarmament clauses. Only in the case of Turkey was this settlement reversed, through uprisings which culminated in the removal of the powers and a new treaty in 1923.

In the 1920s, the League of Nations came into operation and the enforcement of the Paris Peace Treaties became a priority; both of these were adversely affected by the American Senate's refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, effectively excluding the United States from taking an active role in European politics. This refusal negated the unlimited promise of support the Americans gave the French, also absolving the British of their commitments.⁹ This led France to seek a more stringent enforcement of treaty restrictions on Germany, adding to the tension between the two countries. British and French aid to anti-Bolshevik elements in Russia further underscored the fragility of European peace. Great Britain granted only de facto recognition to the new Soviet government late in 1921, a long time after its creation.¹⁰

Japan's arrival on the international scene as a viable military power complicated relationships by drawing Asia, particularly China, into European considerations. The

⁸ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ Bartlett, *The Global Conflict*, 121.

three-way naval race that began between Great Britain, Japan, and the United States served as the impetus for a number of conferences on naval regulation and limitations.¹¹ The first such conference began in Washington in 1921, and led to a weak and essentially non-binding agreement between France, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States, to respect the other signatories' possessions. The Five-Power and Nine-Power Treaty established ratios for each navy in regard to the other powers, but provided little security to weaker nations and were seen as small steps towards easing international tension.¹²

Germany finally received a figure from the League of Nations about reparations in April 1921. The figure cited was astronomical because of pressure from France, but a one-year moratorium on payments was granted by the Reparations Commission acting under British advice.¹³ By 1922 the inability of Great Britain to persuade the United States and France to moderate payment demands caused Germany to fall behind in payments. French fears that Germany's economy was recovering faster than the French led to the 11 January 1923 occupation of the Ruhr.¹⁴ France hoped to receive their due from Germany, and to forcibly revive American and British interest in the continent. German resistance to this occupation destroyed their currency, and silenced many of the remaining voices of moderation in Germany. To settle this conflict the French agreed to the establishment of a committee to inquire into Germany's finances, leading to the Dawes Plan. The Dawes Plan provided for the evacuation of the Ruhr, German

¹¹ Ibid., 131.

¹² Ibid., 134.

¹³ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 47.

¹⁴ Bartlett, *The Global Conflict*, 140.

admission to the League of Nations, a loan to Germany so it could make reparations payments, and the joining of the United States to the Reparations Committee.¹⁵ The Dawes Plan additionally suspended reparations payments for the nearly bankrupt Austria, and reduced the payments of Hungary and Bulgaria.¹⁶ More ominous in the eyes of the French, largely undercutting the confidence restored by the Dawes Plan, was the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and Russia in 1922. Although primarily produced as a bulwark against Russia's isolation from European affairs, it raised the spectre of Russo-German collaboration.¹⁷

Mid-1920s Europe found states pursuing various tactics designed to insure European peace. Disarmament and collective security were the most prominently featured of these tactics, and although the British were hesitant about the former they used the latter as a method of reassuring France against future German aggression.¹⁸ British rejection of the Geneva protocols of 1924 and 1925, which provided for mutual assistance in the face of aggression, led to the protocols' strength being lessened. This was the backdrop to the Locarno treaties of 1925. Their largely unsuccessful outcome can be understood by studying the conflicting goals of some of the parties present. France sought to garner further security against Germany, and although Germany, under Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, was willing to guarantee boundaries in the west it sought to leave room for expansion in the east. This was unacceptable to France, which had ties

¹⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸ Bartlett, *The Global Conflict*, 141.

with the Little Entente consisting of those same eastern countries.¹⁹ Locarno led to less stringent enforcement of the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and increased Russo-German military contracts. Continued demilitarization of the Rhineland, recognition of the Versailles borders, and the establishment of a League council to review treaty violations were Locarno's major accomplishments. Additionally, supervision of German disarmament became the League's responsibility, a task it showed little interest in performing. The rise of revisionism in Germany during the few years of limited prosperity doomed any possibility of early evacuation of the Rhineland. Stresemann's obstinacy regarding eastern revisions was due largely to the relative instability of the Weimar government; he had to appear to be acting vigorously to secure German interests, or the government would lose its support.²⁰

The real European wild card appeared to be Italy, unpredictable after Benito Mussolini came to power in 1922. His strong-arm tactics led to the invasion of Corfu in 1923, and his involvement in Albania in 1926 and 1927. Although his actions were frowned upon, Great Britain and France looked the other way to keep his support for the Ruhr occupation.²¹ As Italian intrigues in Albania alienated Yugoslavia, the latter looked more often to France for support. Mussolini attempted to woo Hungary and Bulgaria, two revisionist powers from World War I, but was careful not to alienate Great Britain at this juncture. Mussolini believed he could take actions considered somewhat antagonistic to France, as long as acceptable relations with Britain were maintained.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

Bulgaria appeared on the European scene relatively infrequently during these years. Its only notable appearance illustrates what many consider the League of Nations' most effective intervention in an international dispute.²² After two Greek officers were killed near the border between Greece and Bulgaria, Greek troops invaded western Bulgaria in 1925. Aristide Briand, the President of the Council, answered Bulgaria's petitions to the League of Nations. He ordered an immediate cease-fire from both sides, and a subsequent investigation fined the Greeks 45,000 pounds.²³ This victory of the League seems to be more attributable to the fact that none of the Council's interests were in jeopardy in either country, allowing impartiality.

Germany's burden was eased slightly by the Young Plan of 1929, which established lower reparations payments annually but extended the length of payments an additional 59 years. Great Britain evacuated the Rhineland after this came into effect, at this time showing little sympathy for French fears and insecurities. The final attempt before the Great Depression to insure peace was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. Initially sought by France as an American guarantee against Germany, it devolved into a document signed by fifteen states renouncing the use of war and promising diplomacy for future conflicts. All this created a tentative period of stability in Europe, which was undercut by the crash of 1929 and the subsequent withdrawal of American loans to Europe.²⁴

²² Ibid., 116.

²³ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 176.

²⁴ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 70.

In the aftermath of this crash, one can see a marked breakdown in international cooperation. German requests for a one-year moratorium on payments were refused, unless German territorial and armament demands were dropped. The shaky German government could not do this for fear of alienating their already waning support. At a meeting in Lausanne in June and July of 1932, a three-year moratorium on German payments was declared; in reality, none of the powers expected payment to resume after this. With reparations payments stopped, Great Britain and France asked the United States to freeze war debt payments. Primarily due to political conditions back home, the Americans refused, which led France and then Great Britain to default on payments.²⁵ Essentially deciding that since reparations were abandoned, war debts were as well, Great Britain and France injured ties to America by stopping payments altogether.

As conditions in Germany worsened, and Great Britain and France remained intransigent, the Nazi party rose to power. It is crucial to note that Hitler's ascendancy was not considered a problem, as neither Great Britain nor France believed his policies would differ dramatically from those of his predecessors.²⁶ Both those countries and the United States believed they had more to fear from the rise of Japanese nationalism in the form of increasing Japanese hostility towards binding naval agreements. Japan's attack on the Manchurian region of China highlighted the unwillingness of the powers to go beyond non-recognition of a country's aggression, and the inability of the League of Nations to control its members. Japan's resignation from this body in 1933 should have warned the world of the dangers of nationalism, but the self-interested Great Powers

²⁵ Ibid., 74.

²⁶ Bartlett, *The Global Conflict*, 146.

ignored this example, which was soon followed by Germany.²⁷ Italian foreign policy in this era turned increasingly towards Ethiopia and the South Tyrol region of Austria, a policy that would further complicate international relationships.

The pattern one discerns throughout these years is the apparent lack of stability and lack of an effective policy for the maintenance of Europe. The League of Nations proved itself inadequate on a number of occasions, with only a few triumphs to its name. Most countries simply found it easier to ignore the League, or withdraw from it, following Japan's example. This continent-wide instability and insecurity would seem to demand increased vigilance and cooperation, yet this was not the case. Before examining Anglo-Bulgarian relations during the crucial years prior to World War II, a brief history of each government's functioning and actions in the years 1918-1933 is needed.

Great Britain, 1918-1933

British policy in the years after the First World War began with the goals set by David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister, at the Paris Peace Conference. These goals were to end the threat of German military power (particularly its high seas fleet), to force reparations upon Germany, and to divide Germany's African colonies amongst the European powers. The open diplomacy demanded by Wilson's principles quickly gave way to an all-powerful Council of Ten, which was later replaced by the Council of Four.²⁸ This Council of Four was comprised of the United States, France, Great Britain, and Italy. Although the League of Nations was established, the exclusion of Germany

²⁷ Ibid., 157.

²⁸ Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 33.

and the Soviet Union, and the absence of the United States created a very weak council. Initially, it appeared to many of the losing powers as a club composed of the victors, with the sole purpose of enforcing the Paris Peace Treaties.

Lloyd George was concerned as early as March 1919 that the Versailles Treaty might have been too harsh on Germany, largely because of financial reports he had gotten from John Maynard Keynes, an influential British economist.²⁹ After the British received German colonies in East Africa, there was little public support for Lloyd George's attempts to resolve the eastern European problems. After the United States refused to join the League of Nations, Lloyd George focused primarily on an exclusive partnership with France to maintain the peace. This partnership was centered on policies for "an activist prime minister with an activist foreign policy."³⁰ Domestic issues were given secondary treatment as Lloyd George began going beyond Lord Curzon and the Foreign Office and calling for European conferences.

The first problem, predictably, was the issue of reparations. Fighting off French demands to be paid in cash or raw materials only, Great Britain sought to bolster its own economy; this economy was suffering in lack of the payments from Germany, and was stifled by constant United States demands for war loans to be repaid. On 27 April 1921 Germany received the reparations figure: 132 billion gold marks. Great Britain knew that Germany would default on payment of this magnitude, and when they did Britain would be in an awkward position. Britain had been attempting to secure an Anglo-French alliance to reassure France and stabilize Europe, but French demands for specific

²⁹ Ibid., 43.

³⁰ Ibid., 53.

commitments doomed British attempts.³¹ Britain took a more tactful position at this impasse by attempting to act as a mediator between German and French interests.

This was the setting for the Washington Conference on reducing armaments, in the aftermath of which Great Britain refused to renew its alliance with Japan, which was done largely at the request of the United States. Perhaps acting partly due to this loss, in March 1921 Britain entered into a modest trade agreement with the Soviet Union, and became the first European great power to acknowledge the Soviet State. While the French ignored British pressure for moderation at Genoa, both countries viewed the Treaty of Rapallo nervously. Britain had no time to focus on this issue, however, for in the meantime it reluctantly conceded its possessions in Turkey after the Greco-Turkish War.³²

Internal issues collided with international issues in 1922, as a shift in government preceded the first collapse of the German economy. After the withdrawal of Conservative support in November 1922, Lloyd George's coalition collapsed and Andrew Bonar Law became Prime Minister. Germany's September defaulting on reparation payments led to French and Belgian occupation in January 1923. As the German economy collapsed, Franco-British relations were strained because of British non-involvement.³³ Partly caused by this strain, but more due to Law's failing health Stanley Baldwin became Prime Minister in May 1923. He was quick to note a rising pro-

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² For more information see P. A. Reynolds, *British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1954).

³³ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 75.

German sentiment in Britain, and that the British public was sick of dealing with European crises. This knowledge availed him little, as a Labour Prime Minister replaced him in January of 1924. Ramsay MacDonald came to power under the Labour pledge of passivity and improved international relations, and initially made good on this by improving relations with Russia.³⁴ Acting on the public's wishes, no alliance with France was created, although MacDonald did let French Prime Minister Raymond Poincare know that he had Britain's support. Despite this, Edouard Herriot replaced Poincare in the spring of 1924; Herriot consequently adopted a more passive policy, one that followed Britain's lead.

The Dawes Plan was received particularly coolly in Britain, as many Britons feared that it would lead to further British world commitments.³⁵ Following this was the Geneva Protocol, which stated that no nation would go to war without first securing the consent of the League. British opinion was against this protocol, as it was seen as attempting to insure Britain would continue to act as Europe's policeman. Largely due to this, Stanley Baldwin replaced MacDonald late in 1924 and appointed Austen Chamberlain as foreign secretary. Chamberlain, who was allotted considerable autonomy by Baldwin, took a pro-French stance and worked closely with Briand, the French foreign minister. He was constantly at odds with public opinion because of this pro-French stance, his continuing criticism of German policy, and his belief that Britain had a duty to act as the arbiter of European peace.³⁶ Because of his criticism of Germany, Britain

³⁴ Ibid., 76.

³⁵ Ibid., 81.

³⁶ Ibid., 86.

nearly refused to take part in the Locarno summit, as Chamberlain saw this as an attempt to split the Anglo-French entente. Finally, Baldwin intervened and accepted Stresemann's proposals on 24 March 1925. Great Britain joined France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in being the first to sign the Locarno accords.

It is important to keep in mind that this was not seen as a perfect solution, since Germany renounced territorial claims only in the east. Perhaps Britain's other problem areas, such as Ireland, India, and the Middle East, helped them to realize this was the best possible advancement for peace. Chamberlain grew increasingly dissatisfied with the League of Nations, which led to his blocking of Germany's entrance into the League, in favor of French-supported Poland.³⁷ Germany's postponed acceptance led to a private meeting between Briand, Stresemann, and Chamberlain, at which nothing was accomplished.

Following this one notes the strained relations between Great Britain and other foreign powers. Anglo-Soviet relations deteriorated rapidly due to Conservative mistrust of the Soviet influence in Great Britain; in 1926 relations with the Soviet Union were broken over a diplomatic incident in London. British relations with the United States and France were similarly strained over disarmament in 1927. Britain quarreled with France over the League of Nations Preparatory Commission, which was assigned the task of regulating armaments.³⁸ At this point one can observe French and British opinion beginning to drastically diverge, as Britain's desire for small standing armies and fewer restrictions on Germany contrasted with France's desire for large standing armies and

³⁷ For more information on the League of Nations see Kathleen Gibberd, *The League in Our Time* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1933).

³⁸ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 100.

more stringent restrictions on Germany. In the Geneva Convention of June 1927, the United States, Great Britain, and Japan argued over the number of naval vessels to be permitted in each country's navy. Baldwin and Chamberlain allowed this to fail, rather than accepting parity with the United States. Such an attitude fits perfectly with Baldwin's signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing war, which was largely due to public criticism he received for hesitating to sign. Following this, an Anglo-French agreement in the Preparatory Commission dealing with disarmament fell through after the French leaked information to the press indicating that the countries were returning to their 1914 ententes.

The fallout from this made Chamberlain appear pro-French, a stance which disturbed Germany as well as the United States. In the May 1929 elections, Labour emerged as the plurality government with Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister and Arthur Henderson as Foreign Secretary. This government attempted several ambitious tasks, among which were resolving Britain's unemployment problem, reviving relations with the Soviet Union, and creating a new reparations plan, later known as the Young Plan.³⁹ Great Britain and France quarreled at the Hague Conference in August 1929, arguing over which country should get the highest percentage of reparations payments. A compromise was effected, but Anglo-French relations were weakened. The compromise was all for naught as the Wall Street crash occurred on 29 October 1929. Within a few months, European markets crashed and Britain and France were calling for the indefinite suspension of reparations.⁴⁰ As the Nazis rose to prominence in Germany, France began

³⁹ Ross, *The Great Powers*, 63-64.

⁴⁰ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 111.

requesting the formation of a European Union, to effect cooperation between Germany and France. Britain remained skeptical of this, largely because the creation of a European Union would injure Anglo-United States economic ties. Despite occasionally working at cross-purposes during these years, both Britain and France seemed to consistently align on major issues. One example is the trepidation felt by both nations after the creation of an Austro-German joint customs union. Even at this stage, Britain and France saw the rise of the Nazi Party as a danger, and so both countries pushed for the Hoover Moratorium on reparations payments in 1931; additionally, the United States and Great Britain extended credit to Germany in hopes of arresting their economic slump.⁴¹

MacDonald's foreign policy focused on disarmament and improving cooperation between Britain and the United States. London hosted a naval disarmament conference in April 1930, in which Britain conceded parity with the United States. A sign of the problematic times ahead was French and Italian refusal to sign "building holiday" documents through the year 1936. Britain's extremely delicate position can be observed in its reaction to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931. Britain was in the midst of an economic crisis, and could not spare the naval forces necessary to make demands on Japan, so the League made weak demands which the Japanese ignored.⁴² Domestically, MacDonald successfully united a National Coalition of Conservative and Liberal elements behind himself. With himself safely secured in power, he chaired a February 1932 disarmament conference. The crucial problem was that France wanted to maintain its military superiority over Germany, while the Germans wanted parity. The

⁴¹ Ibid., 118.

⁴² Ibid., 121.

new foreign secretary, Sir John Simon, added little to this conference because of British refusal to make continental guarantees. Their lack of an army gave them little leverage for bargaining, and they failed to put forth any viable proposals. Shortly afterwards, the Lausanne conference indefinitely suspended German reparations payments. As the Nazi Party gained seats in the Reichstag, Great Britain, France, the United States, and Italy allowed for German parity in armaments in the hopes of bolstering support for the Weimar government. This was too little, too late, as Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933.⁴³

Bulgaria 1918-1933

King Boris III succeeded to the Bulgarian throne in 1918, after his father Ferdinand was forced by the victorious powers of World War I to abdicate. The country was ravaged so badly by the war that most popular support had shifted to leftist parties, such as the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Agrarian Party.⁴⁴ Boris agonized over the signing of the Treaty of Neuilly, with its harsh and restrictive clauses, but the recently appointed Bulgarian Prime Minister Alexander Stambolisky signed it on 27 November 1918. Bulgaria lost Macedonia, the Southern Dobrudja, the frontier town of Tczaribrod, and its Aegean coastline.⁴⁵ Boris would later lament that “There is no doubt that the next twenty-five years of national life were irremediably and tragically marked by the

⁴³ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁴ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 166.

⁴⁵ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 64.

indignation and despair” of signing this treaty.⁴⁶ Thus began the reign of Boris III, in a time of tremendous political and social upheaval. This upheaval would largely continue throughout his reign.

Stambolisky quickly established himself as a pseudo-dictator, and used the government to effect party reforms that made his party, the Agrarian Party, the central party in the government. His anti-monarchist tendencies were well known, and only the approval of the Great Powers and the people saved Boris from forced abdication or worse. Stambolisky held elections in March 1920, which he quickly overturned since his Agrarian Party was short of the majority.⁴⁷ Boris became a mere figurehead under Stambolisky, but his signature remained key in the making of law. The king quickly developed a system to manipulate this by making himself unavailable if the particular bill was not to his liking.⁴⁸ This did little to help Stambolisky’s dislike of the monarchy.

Boris noted the hostility of Stambolisky and the Agrarian Party towards the intelligentsia and urbanites with growing alarm. He feared that despite Stambolisky’s pacifistic tendencies abroad, his dictatorial excesses at home would lead to domestic unrest. By 1922 these excesses led to an uprising in the country, which Stambolisky used as an excuse to remove his opponents from the government. Stambolisky intended to pass a series of agrarian reforms to help Bulgaria remain primarily an agricultural state, but he was overthrown before all of these reforms were passed.⁴⁹ In the wake of these

⁴⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁷ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 167.

⁴⁸ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 68.

⁴⁹ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 168.

dismissals and executions a number of terrorist organizations emerged, the most prominent being the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO).⁵⁰ This group would remain a power in Bulgarian politics through most of the twentieth century. Stambolisky's foreign policy was radical in that Bulgaria was the first of the defeated nations to enter the League of Nations, and that he sought to improve relations with Yugoslavia.⁵¹ His actions led to the 1923 signing of the Treaty of Nis with Yugoslavia, which earned him the hatred of IMRO although it was only a limited frontier settlement.

After another set of sham elections, run merely to allow Stambolisky to fill government posts with members of his party, the Military League overthrew his government. This occurred in April 1923, and was effected by the group that would dominate Bulgarian government until World War II. The Military League began as a small group of top army officers, whose anger over the Treaty of Neuilly led them to illegally stockpile weapons without the League of Nations' consent.⁵² Many of these officers were men who had lost their positions because of the Treaty of Neuilly's restrictions on Bulgaria's standing army.⁵³ After witnessing the Agrarian regime's excesses, this group moved into the political sphere. Despite the overwhelming loyalty of these officers to their king, Boris threatened to abdicate before he would sign off on their extra-constitutional actions. Eventually, he was persuaded to sign because of the possibility of a Bulgarian civil war. His requests that the League protect human life in

⁵⁰ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 82.

⁵¹ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 169.

⁵² Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 88.

⁵³ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 170.

the coup, and allow some Agrarians in the government, were ignored. The highest positions in this new government primarily went to members of the Military League. Alexander Tczankov's broad base of support, comprised of former parties which could no longer exist under the Military League, allowed him to continue in power after a suspicious November 1923 victory.⁵⁴

Although most of the country reacted favorably to the coup, a September uprising, urged by the Bulgarian Communist Party, forced the Tczankov regime to unleash a brutal repression upon all dissenters. This repression, and Boris' lack of power, led to a profound psychological depression that would remain a part of the young king for most of his life. These repressive measures prompted action by IMRO, which proclaimed its heritage as Bulgarian while demanding an independent Macedonia.⁵⁵ Because most IMRO actions at this time were directed against Yugoslavia and Greece, relations with those two countries and their Great Power supporters remained strained. In order to calm relations, the government undertook an intensive pacification campaign that sparked more acts of terrorism. Boris feared "some excessive repression was in the making, which would not only irreparably damage Bulgarian prestige abroad, but would also destroy any chances for national reconciliation."⁵⁶ As the death toll of dissenters grew, Boris began to act against a possible revolution in Bulgaria, by making his unhappiness and desire to peacefully change this government known to the people. At this time in his

⁵⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁵ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 112.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 133.

life, more than any other, Boris was tormented by the knowledge that he could do nothing to help his country.

The instability and unhappiness of the Tczankov regime gave way to a period of renewed optimism after the January 1926 change in government. The transition of power was accomplished peacefully, with the former Prime Minister Tczankov choosing to resign rather than having to be forcefully removed from office. Andrey Liapchev succeeded as Prime Minister. He ushered in a period of true democracy in Bulgaria, in which strict observance of the constitution became government policy. Moderate statesman were allowed in the Sobranje, the Bulgarian parliament, for the first time since the Military League coup.⁵⁷

This was also a rare period of international stability, marked by Boris' pledge of unequivocal allegiance to the League of Nations. After this pledge, the League was favorably disposed towards Bulgaria and granted two loans for internal reconstruction.⁵⁸ This occurred around the same time as Bulgaria's successful petitioning to the League of Nations regarding the Greek invasion in October 1925. The first response of the Sofia government to the invasion was not military action, but appeal to the League of Nations, which cast Boris's struggling nation in a more favorable light. The loans received allowed for improvements in living conditions, nationwide electrification, road construction, and technology.⁵⁹ This stability at home allowed Boris to begin thinking about rectifying long-term Bulgarian problems, namely recovering the Aegean outlet

⁵⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁸ For more information on the League of Nations see Gibberd, *The League in Our Time*.

⁵⁹ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 156.

(promised in Neuilly), a growing refugee population, and the stringent arms limitations imposed in 1919. Boris attempted, while abroad in 1926 and 1927, to determine how the European powers viewed these questions. Although he was well received, it appears that few powers were interested in Bulgaria at this time.

In June 1931 Bulgarian general elections replaced the Democratic Entente government of Liapchev with a new moderate group calling itself the Popular Bloc. Eventually Stoytko Moushanov became leader of this group and Prime Minister of Bulgaria. This successful transfer of power through general elections shocked the world, and the following three-and-a-half years of parliamentary democracy impressed many Great Powers, particularly England. This government is notable for its high degree of cooperation with the King, respect for civil rights, and toleration of opposition parties. Two byproducts of this period were excessive party factionalism, and the rise of the totalitarian, anti-monarchist, Fascist group known as Zveno.⁶⁰ Zveno would emerge as a force to be reckoned with in the years ahead.

During the Great Depression Bulgaria suffered tremendously and became increasingly economically dependent on Germany. Although food was abundant in Bulgaria, money was painfully scarce.⁶¹ The world crisis forced bigger countries to sell their products at prices so low that Bulgaria could not compete. Only Germany bought Bulgarian goods, despite repeated requests from Boris to other countries. He tried to entice other Great Powers to buy from and support Bulgaria because he saw how easy it would be to fall under German economic control. These countries were not interested in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁶¹ Ibid., 185.

buying Bulgaria's produce, and German willingness to barter much-needed industrial goods for all the items Bulgaria needed to unload forced Boris' hand. As Hitler and the Nazis took over in 1933, they increasingly used trade to strengthen ties to their "old comrade-in-arms" while showing understanding to the injustices Bulgaria had suffered since World War I.⁶² Boris' pleas to England, France, and Italy were largely ignored, despite his demonstration of the threat economic dependence on Germany posed to Bulgaria.

It is clear that these years were hard on the fragile European peace as a whole, but they also demonstrate the weaknesses of Great Britain and Bulgaria in particular. Both countries experienced rapid political turnover rates, in which little consistent domestic or foreign policy was carried out. While Great Britain's turnovers were detrimental to consistency, Bulgaria also had the problems that many of their political turnovers were essentially coups by various powerful elements of the country. All these problems combined to create two countries ill suited for the intensified international crises ahead, largely brought about by Hitler and his expansionist policies. Both countries were headed for trouble, but since the British position was more secure responsibility for the future tragedies lies mainly with them. At least in Great Britain all the political turnovers were peaceful, while in Bulgaria coups were an ever-present threat to any government in power. An overview of the years 1933-1941, both in a general diplomatic sense and in an intensive study of Anglo-Bulgarian relations, will reveal why the British failed to secure Bulgarian support in World War II.

⁶² Ibid., 186.

Europe, Great Britain and Bulgaria, 1933-1941

The year 1933 saw little change in either Great Britain or Bulgaria, despite the rise of Hitler and the National Socialist Party. Stanley Baldwin was the most powerful figure in Great Britain from 1922-1937, since as leader of the Conservative Party he dramatically influenced all the governments during those years. He is regarded as an ineffective, deceptive, and domestically inclined leader.⁶³ This type of leadership would handicap the British government and its foreign policy. In 1933, most British leaders thought Hitler's policy would not deviate from that of his predecessors, or that he would at least moderate his views over the years.⁶⁴ At the time of Hitler's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, John Simon was Foreign Secretary and Anthony Eden had recently been appointed Great Britain's representative at the League of Nations. A good deal of tension existed between these two men, because Eden saw Simon as indecisive and noncommittal. Despite this, the two men initially agreed on their opinions of Hitler; a report they received in April 1933 regarding Hitler and his anti-Semitism concerned them. These concerns were dismissed by Baldwin, who simply refused to comprehend the implications of Hitler's statements.⁶⁵

Hitler's diplomatic tactic of causing a crisis and then backing down confused British foreign policy makers. Most Conservatives in Britain chose to ignore what Germany was becoming in the 1930s, with Winston Churchill being the only notable

⁶³ Margaret George, *The Warped Vision: British Foreign Policy, 1933-1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965), 41.

⁶⁴ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 158.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

exception.⁶⁶ Guilt over the harshness of the Versailles Peace, and a weakened economy and military, led Britain to conclude that pacifistic tendencies would serve them best. Those in government believed that dealing with the Germans and avoiding war would best insure the people's happiness, so measures were taken to further Britain's role as mediator of European conflicts.⁶⁷ Most government officials cited the East Fulham by-election of October 1933 in support of Britain's pacifism; in this election, a pacifistic Labour candidate decisively defeated the pro-rearmament Conservative candidate. British policymakers, especially Baldwin, would continually cite this election as an example of what the people wanted.⁶⁸ This, combined with poor British military preparations, led to a foreign policy that was pacifistic and moderate.

Bulgaria took little notice of Hitler's accession in 1933, since it was preoccupied with other pressing international and domestic issues. Boris's visit to Great Britain in the summer of 1933 oriented him towards a rapprochement with Yugoslavia. This was a venture suggested by Britain, but the credit for following up on this idea belongs to Boris. Ignoring both IMRO and revisionist threats, Boris was determined to extend an olive branch to this traditional enemy.⁶⁹ His efforts were rewarded in May 1933 when a treaty was signed between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Although this treaty had only ceremonial value, it was a beginning. This also marked the beginning of Yugoslav pressure to join the forming Balkan Pact, pressure which Boris felt compelled to ignore. He refused to

⁶⁶ George, *The Warped Vision*, 46.

⁶⁷ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁹ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 187.

commit himself at this stage, because joining the Pact would necessitate renouncing all territorial claims on lands occupied by members of the Pact.⁷⁰ This refusal to sign made Bulgaria the prime target of the Balkan Pact, which Yugoslav invitations tried to avoid. Boris met with the leaders of both Turkey and Romania to try to undercut this intent. Despite his efforts, the Pact was signed February 1934.⁷¹ Boris explained his position to King Alexander of Yugoslavia, stating that he hoped for friendly relations with his neighbors but could not at this time renounce Bulgaria's territorial claims.

Internally, Bulgarian politics were reaching a boiling point. The current war minister was about to be replaced, and the politicized army, under the Military League, was pushing a variety of candidates.⁷² Despite pressure from some advisors to act against these military officials, Boris hesitated, partly because of his attachment to the military but more because he realized the wrong actions now could push the country into a civil war. He realized that given the current situation, he could not command the nation with any guarantee of being obeyed. Instead, he decided to wait for others to make their move and then respond. He would allow a coup in 1934, and manipulate another attempt in 1935.⁷³

Foreign Office documents from 1932 and 1933 show that Germany was not a priority for either country, and that Britain was primarily focused on Bulgaria's domestic affairs and relations with her neighbors. In 1932 Britain tried to persuade Bulgaria to put

⁷⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁷¹ Ibid., 191.

⁷² Ibid., 197.

⁷³ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 171.

her suffering economy almost completely under the control of the League of Nations.⁷⁴

The first document after Hitler's accession discussed the rise of IMRO in Bulgaria. In this document, the British ambassador in Sofia, Sydney Waterlow, expressed grave doubts that any rapprochement with Yugoslavia could occur while this group exists. The British ambassador believed that IMRO's rise was partly attributable to Italian support, and that rapprochement was "a mere dream" until this support is cut off.⁷⁵ A response from John Simon in March criticized Bulgaria for retaining control of part of its economy, even as the British Bondholders' Committee floated Bulgaria loans. The Bulgarian minister in London discussed with Simon the possibility of not being able to pay back these loans on time, and Simon's response hinted that this would impact future loans, from the League or Great Britain, to Bulgaria. Such heavy-handed hinting, which were almost orders, are found in many documents from 1933, despite British recognition that Bulgarians are traditionally suspicious of foreign motives and in flagrant violation of Britain's professed impartiality. Waterlow applied British pressure to force Bulgaria to crack down on IMRO, and to open talks with Bulgaria's neighbors.⁷⁶

As he began to realize the pathetic situation Bulgaria's economy placed it in, Waterlow moderated the tone of his reports and hinted that Britain needed to support Boris and Bulgaria. He recognized that as British demands for their bondholders' money intensified, Bulgarian public opinion denounced those lenders as "shylocks demanding

⁷⁴Foreign Office, "Report from Sydney Waterlow to John Simon," 11 December 1932, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office 1919-1939*, Part II, Series F (Europe), vol. 9 (1933), ed. Christopher Seton-Watson (London: University Publications of America, 1992), 210.

⁷⁵"Waterlow to Simon," 19 February 1933, *BDFFA*, vol. 9, 240.

⁷⁶"Waterlow to Simon," 17 and 19 March 1933, *BDFFA*, vol. 9, 263 and 264.

their pound of flesh.”⁷⁷ Waterlow continued to support the reform of Bulgaria’s economy, but warned that if the League abandoned Bulgaria due to defaulting on loans that Italy or perhaps even Germany would offer loans. This first reference to Germany advancing a form of economic control is important, as later documents dwelled heavily on this issue. Waterlow responded unfavorably to the German minister of propaganda’s public declaration that Bulgaria had a good deal in common with Germany. Britain redoubled its encouragement of Bulgarian efforts at rapprochement with Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Waterlow, and his replacement John Balfour, warned that only through strict fidelity to the principles of the League of Nations could Bulgaria reverse its isolated position.⁷⁸

If complimentary regarding Bulgarian compliance, these later documents saw the instability evident in Bulgarian politics. Waterlow warned Simon of the disintegration of government authority, and hinted that only a coup d’etat would restore stability.⁷⁹ The party system, as it existed in Bulgaria, was blamed for the gridlock and incompetence present in government. Balfour also cited the existence of IMRO as a political power in the nation as blocking total rapprochement with Bulgaria’s neighbors. Balfour seemed surprised that the ineffectual government was able to renew a Turco-Bulgarian Treaty of Neutrality, and rewarded this with official British recognition of Bulgaria’s territorial desires. Waterlow, acting for Britain, encouraged the Balkan powers to work together for protection, but for Bulgaria to join this group her territorial ambitions had to be

⁷⁷ “Waterlow to Simon,” 15 April 1933, *B DFA*, vol. 9, 277.

⁷⁸ “Report from John Balfour to John Simon,” 29 September 1933, *B DFA*, vol. 9, 364.

⁷⁹ “Waterlow to Simon,” 23 June 1933, *B DFA*, vol. 9, 320.

abandoned, and Boris claimed public pressure and governmental instability did not allow this. Another 1933 document from Waterlow to Simon, provided a good synopsis of the communiqués sent from the British ambassador in Sofia to Britain. In it, Waterlow expressed Britain's unhappiness at Bulgaria's "wasting" of League of Nations loans, urged British support for a stronger government in Bulgaria, and offered hope that Bulgaria's foreign policy advancements would end their isolation and provide security for the Balkans as a whole.⁸⁰ Finally, reports from both Nevile Henderson and John Balfour, in December, discussed the Bulgarian royal couple's visit to Belgrade. These reports both concluded that although Bulgarian irredentism was difficult to build good relations on, it could be done if the more decided threat of IMRO to Yugoslavia was handled properly.⁸¹

British conservatives pursued an ambivalent policy towards Germany in 1934, allowing a 1935 naval agreement to be signed between the two powers that granted Germany a fleet 35 percent of the British fleet.⁸² Although this effectively nullified the Treaty of Versailles, British policymakers preferred to strengthen their ties to the forming Franco-Italian alliance than to improve relations with Germany. A report published in 1934 listed Germany as the prime threat to British security in the coming years.⁸³ Neville Chamberlain, serving as Chancellor of the Exchequer, still sought a policy of equivocation towards the Germans while Britain rearmed. Chamberlain believed that a

⁸⁰ "Waterlow to Simon," 27 November 1933, *BDFFA*, vol. 9, 402.

⁸¹ "Balfour to Simon," 22 December 1933, *BDFFA*, vol. 10, 85.

⁸² George, *The Warped Vision*, 47.

⁸³ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 164.

solid military defense could only be supported by a sound economy.⁸⁴ In spite of these steps, British reluctance to back the League of Nations after Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria led in 1934 to Britain virtually ignoring the League. Baldwin saw British policy as rooted in deciding each problem as it emerged, and deciding it based only on British needs and interests. He believed the League of Nations as it then existed had little hope for the future, but continued to deceive the British people as to the favorable impact it was having; both he and Chamberlain began pursuing tactics of "political survival," and decided against taking any future foreign policy risks.⁸⁵

The major foreign events of 1934 were the signing of the German-Polish non-aggression pact, and an attempted coup in Austria.⁸⁶ Britain saw both of these as detrimental to future security. The pact with Poland was openly seen by all European powers as solely designed to secure Germany's eastern border, and to undermine France's eastern "Little Entente." Later in 1934, when Austrian Nazis (acting on orders from Germany) tried to overthrow the government of Chancellor Dollfuss, Italy mobilized and threatened Germany. Finally, after the Austrian Nazis were stopped, France and Italy signed a pledge to cooperate against future German action in Austria. France also began to cultivate defensive ties with Russia, leading to Russia's joining the League of Nations in September 1934.⁸⁷ Britain took no stance on all of these proceedings, and seemed content to merely focus on its own interests.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 166.

⁸⁵ George, *The Warped Vision*, 54.

⁸⁶ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 167-8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 168.

Bulgarian politics underwent a more dramatic change in 1934. The Moushanov government had long since ceased to impress the Military League, which by 1934 was led by Colonel Damian Veltchev. Moushanov's incompetence and ineffectiveness prompted the organization of a coup. Although Veltchev was an adversary of the crown, the majority of the people desiring a coup, Military League and Zveno members, sought to leave Boris's position untouched.⁸⁸ The resignation of the Moushanov cabinet, and Boris's mandate for a new one, came when discontent was highest among the military. Boris's appointment of General Vatev as the new war minister sparked the 1934 coup, despite the King's hopes that he could head off efforts at non-constitutional reform and force the army out of politics.

Although Boris did not have enough time to devise constitutional methods of reform, he was waiting for Kimon Gheorgiev and General Pentcho Zlatev to arrive at the royal palace on May 19, 1934.⁸⁹ They were to become the new Prime Minister and War Minister respectively, and although Boris appointed them to those posts he was successful in limiting the number of officials dismissed by the new government. This government began by banning political parties, including IMRO, dissolving the Sobranje, and reinstating censorship of the press.⁹⁰ The public's initial favorable reaction lessened when it became apparent that this was a coup by disaffected Military League men only, and that Veltchev was running the government from behind the scenes. As the

⁸⁸ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 200.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹⁰ For more information on the coup's effects see R. J. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

government made its hostility towards the King apparent, the public turned their favor upon Boris. Largely due to the rivalry between Zveno members and the military, and between Veltchev and Zlatev, this government was seen as even more incompetent and amateur than its predecessor.⁹¹ Boris now began to exploit the differences between the two groups, as he resolved to take charge himself at the first opportunity. He protected himself from action by this new government by openly supporting and assisting their Yugoslav rapprochement policies. The following year Boris took charge himself.

British documents for this year are interesting because their treatment and evaluation of the coup and its aftereffects is secondary to British personal interests in Bulgaria. John Balfour's first report from 1934 focused on Bulgarian reaction to the Balkan Pact. Bulgaria had a problem with its goal of maintaining the status quo, for this seemed to deny Bulgaria the League Covenant and the Four-Power Pact possibilities of territorial revision.⁹² These documents from the early part of the year reveal that Bulgaria tried desperately to do what Great Britain wanted in order to maintain their backing or the hope of their backing for revision of the Treaty of Neuilly. The Bulgarian ministers promised Balfour that a commercial treaty was being constructed between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and that if Yugoslavia joined the Balkan Pact this would hurt this treaty and relations between the two countries. They continued to claim that Neuilly was unjust, and merited revision; they continued to try to use the League of Nations to revise the treaty, because they knew this was what Great Britain wanted. Furthermore, even after Yugoslavia signed the Balkan Pact, Bulgaria promised to sign a number of

⁹¹ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 214.

⁹² Balfour to Simon, 15 January 1934, *BDF*, vol. 10, 90.

other peace pacts with Balkan powers. This was in lieu of signing the Balkan Pact, which would cause Bulgaria to give up all territorial revisions, and was done mainly because of Great Britain's desire for peace and mutual friendship among neighbors.⁹³ Britain recognized but downplayed the role of the public in this decision, a public that openly made known its hostility towards the Pact. Underestimation of the public would have disastrous effects on British policy in coming years.

Several documents in 1934 focused on the changing economic situation in Bulgaria. C. H. Bentinck, the new ambassador in Sofia, reported in February 1934 with some joy that the Bulgarian government rejected an offer from a German consortium to exchange railway and other industrial items for Bulgarian tobacco. Bentinck realized that this "would have to all intents and purposes handed over the Bulgarian market as an appendage of German industry for years to come".⁹⁴ Bentinck encouraged British firms to fill the void the Germans are seeking to fill, before it was too late. Another document, pertaining to the same offer, showed that as early as 1934 many Bulgarians saw Germany as more attentive and supportive than any other country. German exporting firms understood Bulgaria's situation and afforded generous latitude of payment for goods supplied, leading many Bulgarians to conclude that Germany was the preferable great power trading partner.⁹⁵

Britain seemed to have anticipated the coup, as the document chronologically preceding the date of the coup discussed the sorry state of Bulgarian finances and noted

⁹³ "Simon to Balfour," 12 February 1934, *B DFA*, vol. 10, 112.

⁹⁴ "C. H. Bentinck to John Simon," 4 February 1934, *B DFA*, vol. 10, 113.

⁹⁵ "Bentinck to Simon," 28 March 1934, *B DFA*, vol. 10, 143.

the current government's testiness over British interference. The new government of Gheorgiev was initially seen as one that would follow its predecessor, both in attempting to establish good relations with Bulgaria's neighbors and in trying to repair its financial state of affairs.⁹⁶ Many of the later communiqués about the new government were positive, especially regarding its foreign policy of rapprochement, but criticized its suspension of constitutional rights. As the year concluded, Bulgarian attempts at rapprochement with Romania continued to be stalled, and the German consortium eventually concluded a deal with the Bulgarian government. Britain recognized that the government in power now seemed provisional in nature, and not likely to continue indefinitely. A financial report from the end of the year concluded that "the budget remains unbalanced, the general economic condition of the country shows only slight improvement, and the position of the National Bank... have greatly deteriorated."⁹⁷ This showed that Britain recognized the instability of Bulgaria's economy and government, but continued to do little to help other than offering advice. These years were a crucial turning point in which Britain could have provided some support for Bulgaria's economy; instead, Germany picked up the slack.

British politicians had to deal with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, an invasion Mussolini justified by a promise from Britain in 1925 but which nonetheless Britain now opposed.⁹⁸ Ethiopia called on the League of Nations to intervene on its behalf, and while the League deliberated Britain began feeling that a strong check on

⁹⁶ "Bentinck to Simon," 22 May 1934, *BDFa*, vol. 10, 156.

⁹⁷ "Bentinck to Simon," 25 November 1934, *BDFa*, vol. 10, 230.

⁹⁸ For more information on Italy in these years see Phillip Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1919-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

fascism was needed. The conservative element in Britain used this crisis as a campaign aid, and called an election at this time to give the appearance of having a mandate for action. The government seemed supportive of a League of Nations intervention, but even the press could tell they were not really in favor of it and were just using it to garner votes.⁹⁹ Privately, the cabinet was against even collective action with France, despite Anthony Eden's arguments in favor of it. The French government refused to act without Britain, and also was hesitant to alienate Mussolini as a possible ally against Germany. The British and French solution was the Hoare-Laval Pact of December 1935, in which Mussolini was given control over two-thirds of Ethiopia and the Ethiopians were allowed the rest.¹⁰⁰ Although both governments believed this fulfilled their League obligations, the British public denounced this act when it became public and it led to the humiliation of Baldwin and the government. The debacle of 1935 showed that Britain was much more interested in domestic issues than international, and that the League of Nations was essentially defunct as a means of enforcement.¹⁰¹ Also, in the aftermath of this crisis, the seeds of appeasement were sown into Neville Chamberlain's personality.

The return of the Saar Valley to Germany occurred in 1935, and British acceptance of this, set the tone for their policy towards Germany. John Simon helped encourage the formation of a Committee on German Rearmament, which was headed by himself and Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister since 1929. At this point, Simon

⁹⁹ George, *The Warped Vision*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰¹ For more information on the League of Nations see R. J. Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

and the Committee saw an agreement with Germany as Britain's best chance to secure peace; the only possible obstacle was France.¹⁰² Despite the attempted publishing of a Four-Point Plan on European Security, in which France would have repudiated the Versailles rearmament terms for Germany, Hitler acted unilaterally in March 1935 and repudiated Versailles. This, combined with the later Stresa Front (Great Britain, France, Italy) and the Franco-Soviet Pact of May, bothered the British government.¹⁰³ They saw the very real possibility of Britain being dragged into another European War, which led to Stanley Baldwin becoming Prime Minister of a predominantly Conservative national government.

The instability of the Bulgarian government at the end of 1934 allowed Boris to effectively make himself ruler of Bulgaria in 1935, over the wishes of the Military League and Zveno elements. In January, the Gheorghiev government fell because of military distrust of the Zveno elements in the government. Veltchev continued as the power behind the throne, and attempted to limit Boris' power even more. He was removed by the military, whose loyalty to the Boris was unquestionable.¹⁰⁴ Zlatev formed a new government with no Zveno elements, one committed to the previous government's goals. This government fell midway through 1935, and the King took charge by refusing the Military League's suggested successor and installing Andrea Toshev as Prime Minister. Boris effected a "coup executed by the King himself," as the

¹⁰² Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, 169.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 225.

first part of his plan to eventually return to Constitutional government.¹⁰⁵ On November 23, the King extended his control by installing George Kiosseivanov, the former Foreign Minister, as Toshev's replacement. Kiosseivanov was devoted to the King and with Boris he laid out a complex plan in which municipal elections and the King's exercise of power would eventually return the country to constitutional rule.¹⁰⁶

That both Great Britain and Bulgaria were unusually occupied by events domestic and international in 1935 is reflected in the relative dearth of published documentation. Bentinck correctly assumed as early as January that although tension between the crown and the government was obvious, the overwhelming support for Boris from the military kept him safe from a coup. Later noted, however, was the problem that all Bulgarian governments continued being viewed with some suspicion and mistrust by their Balkan neighbors, with the exception of Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁷ Bentinck believed that this mistrust stemmed from Bulgaria's refusal to renounce any desire for territorial revisions. Bentinck was concerned with the politicization of the military, but felt that as long as Boris could act as a moderating influence there would not be any problems. Britain seemed far more occupied with events in Greece, in particular the Venizelist military rebellion, than with Bulgaria. Bentinck noted that the Stresa decisions, in which Germany announced its own rearmament, gave Bulgaria hope for territorial and armament revision of the Treaty of Neuilly.¹⁰⁸ A discussion between Boris, then Minister

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁰⁷ "Bentinck to Simon," 30 January 1935, *BDFFA*, vol. 11, 126.

¹⁰⁸ "Bentinck to Simon," 18 April 1935, *BDFFA*, vol. 11, 166.

of Foreign Affairs Kiosseivanoff, Bentinck, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs M. Simeon Radiff illuminated Bulgaria's concerns in 1935 and Britain's reaction to them. Boris asked that Bulgaria be allowed to rearm, using the example of German rearmament without permission and Bulgaria's adherence to the League of Nations as arguments in favor of Bulgaria's good intentions. Bentinck said he would convey this to Britain, but felt that Bulgaria's interests could best be served by joining the Balkan Pact. This was not a viable option, because irredentist elements in Bulgaria would never allow it.¹⁰⁹ Aside from ignoring the tumultuous domestic affairs of Bulgaria in favor of their traditional ally Greece, a report discussing the extent of German economic penetration in the Balkans barely mentioned Bulgaria. Similarities between the two countries' treatment at the end of the war, and growing economic interdependence, was virtually ignored in favor of the belief that Bulgaria "has not entirely forgotten the disasters into which King Ferdinand's pro-German policy led her."¹¹⁰ With this statement, Britain dismissed the reports of collaborative meetings between Goring and pro-fascist Bulgarians. This year highlighted the extent to which British attention turned elsewhere, and in which the German-Bulgar alignment began.

At the start of 1936, conservative circles in Britain voiced the opinion that a policy of appeasement would be preferable to another Ethiopian fiasco.¹¹¹ Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland in March, which he justified through the Franco-Soviet Pact, gave these groups the freedom to try out their policy. Despite their obligations to

¹⁰⁹ "Bentinck to Simon," 18 May 1935, *BDFFA*, vol. 11, 191.

¹¹⁰ "Report on German Policy in Central and Southeast Europe," 29 August 1935, *BDFFA*, vol. 11, 228.

¹¹¹ George, *The Warped Vision*, 75.

France, Britain refused to sanction Hitler militarily or economically, and allowed the occupation after he promised to respect Western security and British interests. This marked the beginning of an increasingly vocal pro-German and anti-French movement in Britain.¹¹² This group directly influenced Baldwin, and used France as a scapegoat for all recent European problems. Particularly damning was their argument that by supporting France, Britain was supporting the Soviet Union also; this alignment with a communist nation was unacceptable. Despite their pressure, it was in this year that Baldwin's indecisive and hesitating leadership became apparent, particularly regarding Germany.¹¹³

Baldwin was unprepared for the events of the Spanish Civil War, in which communist forces, supported by France and the Soviet Union, were opposed by fascist forces, supported by Italy and Germany. Britain resolved to consider only her interests in this matter, but its public claims of impartiality was falsified by the obvious anti-communist stance of the government.¹¹⁴ Although Britain negotiated an agreement pledging international neutrality regarding the war, which all the participants signed, Germany and Italy ignored this and continued to support the rebels. This policy of neutrality, a policy primarily advocated by Anthony Eden, chose to ignore violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement. By the end of 1937, the government passed another bill saying Britain would not defend any ships (even British ships) with contraband bound for Spain, and prevented British volunteers from serving in Spain; the public was

¹¹² Ibid., 80.

¹¹³ See Adams, *British Politics*, Chap. 3.

¹¹⁴ George, *The Warped Vision*, 95.

horrified, since these seemed to allow British vessels to be attacked.¹¹⁵ Even as Italian troops were being used in Spain, Baldwin “worked mightily to make an ally of Mussolini, to compensate him for the irritation they had caused him in Ethiopia, to give him room in the Mediterranean.”¹¹⁶ This determination to remain neutral was noticed by Italy and Germany, and would later cause innumerable problems.

As 1936 began, Boris set definite goals for his new Bulgarian government. He set out to balance the budget, improve relations with his Balkan neighbors, and depoliticize the army.¹¹⁷ To improve relations, he proclaimed Bulgaria’s peaceful intentions to its neighbors and stressed its strict adherence to the Treaty of Neuilly. He asked for an increase in Bulgaria’s army, and for loans to rebuild the infrastructure of his country. Boris strove to change the international impression of Bulgaria, which was largely the same as it had been in 1919; these unfavorable impressions were the reasons Bulgaria was viewed with distrust. Despite his and Kiosseivanov’s work on constitutional amendments and electoral laws, and their stabilization of the country, Boris felt that until the military were removed from the political scene Bulgaria would not be trusted. His pleas for modern armaments fell on largely deaf ears, and his attempt to incorporate dissenting parties into the government failed. The grand elections he proposed for October were postponed, but the smaller municipal elections showed that the public approved of this government and the nonparty system in general.¹¹⁸ In

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 103.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁷ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 232.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 237.

conclusion, 1936 saw Bulgaria acquire some stability in international and domestic affairs.

A conversation Anthony Eden had with King Boris in 1936 reflected Bulgaria's attitude at this time. Boris professed contentment with Bulgaria's current borders, thanked Britain for its impartiality in international affairs, and deplored the lack of competent politicians in Bulgaria. This document showed how hard Boris was trying by 1936 to ingratiate Bulgaria to Britain and convince them of Bulgaria's good intentions and need for help.¹¹⁹ Further evidence appeared as Boris related all the details of his trip through Europe to Bentinck. Boris took great pains to tell Bentinck how he expressed to British officials how much damage Bulgaria's economy suffered due to their strict observance of League of Nations sanctions against Italy.¹²⁰ This was the equivalent of the proud leader of a nation asking for help from a Great Power. A report on German economic penetration into Bulgaria revealed that at the beginning of 1936, Germany accounted for 73 percent of Bulgaria's exports while Germany products were 65 percent of Bulgaria's imports. Bentinck went as far as saying that "this state of affairs is causing anxiety to my French colleague and to myself, but above all to the Bulgarian Government, who seem to be powerless to extricate themselves from a vicious circle."¹²¹ German willingness to pay higher prices for Bulgarian goods offered little chance of extracting the economy from German hands. Despite this growing economic domination, Bentinck's appeals for Great Power assistance in this matter were ignored in London.

¹¹⁹ "Anthony Eden to C. H. Bentinck," 30 January 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 110.

¹²⁰ "Bentinck to Eden," 22 February 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 123.

¹²¹ "Bentinck to Eden," 23 April 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 155.

The Foreign Office concluded that expanding German economic interests were designed to insure neutrality in the case of a war, and yet decided that the only negative impact on British interests was increased economic competition between Germany and Britain.¹²² This report concluded with possible advantages of a greater German economic sphere, with international economic stability as a possibility; what was ignored was something the report alluded to earlier, which was that economics allow control to be exercised by one nation over another. As early as June, reports from Bentinck to Eden suggested that in the next few years economic ties would matter more than political pacts.¹²³ Bentinck even considered that this increase in economic interdependence would draw countries to join Germany in a military pact, yet the British government seemed to disregard this possibility. The final economic dispatch of the year concluded that Bulgaria's economy continued to slowly recover, due in no small part to valuable German assistance.

Boris continued to request modern military weaponry in 1936, and admitted that Bulgaria had some weapons in violation of Neuilly.¹²⁴ Because of his honesty regarding this matter, Britain did not object. Great Britain also accepted the establishment of Boris as dictator, but only because Boris promised to move the country towards constitutional reforms.¹²⁵ Bentinck recognized the instability evident in Bulgarian politics and accepted that extra-constitutional measures might be necessary for a while. An interesting report from Major Ross revealed that the arrival of a new German military attaché in Sofia

¹²² "Memorandum Respecting German Economic Penetration in Central Europe, the Balkans, and Turkey," 17 August 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 208.

¹²³ "Bentinck to Eden," 24 June 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 192.

¹²⁴ "Report from Major Ross to C. H. Bentinck," 9 May 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 170.

¹²⁵ "Bentinck to Eden," 22 May 1936, *BDFFA*, vol. 12, 173.

coincided with placement of a large Bulgarian weaponry shipment to Germany.¹²⁶ Ross explained to Sofia that Britain refused to sell Bulgaria weapons of this type because it still openly adhered to Neuilly, but Ross privately urged the British government to acquire this market before it was too late. The arrival of the President of the Reichsbank in Sofia was virtually ignored by Bentinck, who commented more on the man's lack of tact than his persuasive arguments for Bulgaria tying her economy to Germany. In a conversation Bentinck had with the United States ambassador to Sofia, concerns about Bulgaria's economy were revealed by even the United States criticizing the "free economic hand in the Balkans" Britain was giving Germany.¹²⁷ Further pressure on Bulgaria to join the Balkan Pact necessitated Boris's asking for an Aegean port in return; faced with this request, Britain stalled, claiming that a quid pro quo was not in order.¹²⁸ Bentinck claimed that unless Bulgaria received a hearing for its claims, it would most likely end up opposing Greece and her allies (Britain) in the next war. Britain continued to recognize and support Boris' regime, and tried to minimize any instability caused by their stalling.

January 1937 found the Spanish Civil War still occupying a good deal of British attention and energy, as a solution had yet to be found. The Lyon Conference showed what could be accomplished by taking a firm stand against dictators. A combined British-Russian-French agreement to shoot unidentified submarines in the Mediterranean

¹²⁶ "Ross to Bentinck," 27 May 1936, *BDF*, vol. XII, 180.

¹²⁷ "Bentinck to Eden," 20 June 1936, *BDF*, vol. XII, 185.

¹²⁸ "Bentinck to Eden," 31 August 1936, *BDF*, vol. XII, 221.

stopped Italian piracy.¹²⁹ Although unhappy with the Nazi government, Conservative British policymakers “were positively trying to soothe the Germans” by 1937.¹³⁰ Many members of the aristocracy, the public, and the business community united not so much in support of fascism as in fear of communism. Businesses, associations, and institutions of higher learning openly advocated a pro-German appeasement policy, which would allow Britain to pursue its own interests unhindered. Chamberlain succeeded Baldwin in May 1937, and resolved to be more decisive than his predecessor. He sought to make the fascists of the world understand that Britain intended them no harm. His experience in the business world made him want to deal with Hitler and Mussolini the way one would deal with two business associates one wanted to continue doing business with.¹³¹ In order to make this work, he needed a government united in support of him; to maintain this government, he used “subterfuge, evasion, and dishonesty” against Parliament.¹³²

He fought with the Foreign Office more than any Prime Minister, since from his accession he sought to remove those opposed to a policy of appeasement. Germanophobes such as Sir Eric Phipps were dismissed outright, but Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was his prime target. Chamberlain began a policy of circumventing Eden’s authority, since Eden’s opposition to appeasement was well known. Chamberlain believed that only by increasing good will between Britain and Italy could agreement

¹²⁹ George, *The Warped Vision*, 108.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹³¹ For more information about Neville Chamberlain, see R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

¹³² George, *The Warped Vision*, 174.

between Germany and Britain occur.¹³³ The November 1937 expedition of Lord Halifax to Germany provided the rationale for Eden's dismissal. Chamberlain and Halifax thought tolerance of Germany's position would help ease tension, so both men jumped at the opportunity this trip gave them. Eden supported a coordinated policy, between Great Britain and the United States, which would restrict the dictators.¹³⁴ Chamberlain's aggravation with Eden grew when the latter began drawing up plans in which Italy was considered an enemy and when Eden publicly advocated caution when dealing with Italy. Chamberlain waited until Eden was on vacation and then opened discussions with Italy concerning de jure recognition of Ethiopia as part of Italy. Even though his authority was circumvented by the Prime Minister, Eden fought this policy and after winning the Cabinet to his side was driven by Chamberlain's intransigence to resign in 1938.¹³⁵ With Eden gone, the Foreign Office merely echoed Chamberlain's wishes and he was free to pursue a Four-Power Pact among Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. The groundwork for full appeasement was laid by the end of 1937.

Events in Bulgarian domestic affairs were surprisingly calm during 1937, although a portent of future problems was evident. The League of Nations finally approved Bulgarian requests for the replacement of obsolete weapons, and Boris contacted France, Britain, and Germany as possible suppliers.¹³⁶ Not surprisingly, only Germany responded to Bulgarian inquiries. Although this caused some alarm among

¹³³ Ibid., 176.

¹³⁴ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 105.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹³⁶ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 240.

France and Britain, Boris assured them that any agreements that were concluded would be neither military nor formal alliances. This year saw the beginning of collaboration between Bulgarian Minister of War General Christo Loukov and Finance Minister Gouvov, and Hermann Goering and Hjalmar Schacht. The relatively stable transitions from government to government in Bulgaria allowed for Boris to undertake these risky first steps towards finalizing Bulgaria's reconstruction since World War I by updating its military.

The new British minister in Sofia, Maurice Peterson, reported that he conveyed to Boris early in 1937 the necessity of returning to constitutional government. Boris responded that this might be impossible as long as the Military League continued to exist, and as long as key military officials remained unhappy with Bulgaria's borders the League would remain.¹³⁷ Following this was a long period in which most communications focused on other Balkan powers, among them Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, and even Albania. Peterson to recounted the details of a conversation with Kiosseivanov to Anthony Eden, in which the latter reassured Peterson that parliamentary elections were forthcoming.¹³⁸ Kiosseivanov was careful to explain that this would not be a return to the disorganized party government from before 1934.

Most interesting of the documents from 1937 were a series directly pertaining to German influence in Bulgaria, as this reflected Britain's growing concern. The first discussed the widespread nature of German propaganda, which was carried out so unostentatiously that it was difficult to discern. Cultural propaganda seemed to center

¹³⁷ "Report from Maurice Peterson to Anthony Eden," 26 February 1937, *BDF*, vol. 13, 116.

¹³⁸ "Peterson to Eden," 28 July 1937, *BDF*, vol. 13, 177.

entirely on the German educational schools in Sofia, which were the best and attracted the best Bulgarian students. He also noted the influence Germany wielded because of its help rearming Bulgaria. A check of the number of German attaché officers assigned to the Bulgarian army revealed only two at this time, German influence could become noticeable if Germany alone continued to help Bulgaria rearm.¹³⁹ In a discussion between Eden and Boris, Boris explained that Bulgaria could not join the Balkan Pact because of territorial ambitions. At the same time, Boris praised the economic ties Bulgaria had with Britain, as they helped avoid complete dependence on Germany, but he begged for more.¹⁴⁰

A possible international situation was averted by Britain when Bulgaria's initial requests to France about a possible Bulgarian fleet became known to Turkey. Britain took an active role to explain that the three requested vessels did not constitute an excessive threat; more important than this, Peterson noted in his report to London that Greece and Turkey seemed to be acting to destroy Bulgaria's good foreign relations, especially with Yugoslavia.¹⁴¹ The memorandum to this report stated that Bulgarian rearmament was now acceptable, because the irrendentist elements of the past had lessened their hold on the government. Also, Colonel Ross believed that because of the Balkan Entente's recurring hostility towards Bulgaria perhaps Bulgarian rearmament would cause a reevaluation of this attitude. At the very least, it might help to lessen the feelings of the Greek and Romanian general staffs, who felt that Bulgaria must be kept

¹³⁹ "Report from Mr. Stirling to Anthony Eden," 9 October 1937, *BDF*, vol. 13, 193.

¹⁴⁰ "Eden to Peterson," 6 November 1937, *BDF*, vol. 13, 206.

¹⁴¹ "Eden to Peterson," 26 November 1937, *BDF*, vol. 13, 221.

crushed. Peterson concluded at the end of 1937 that Bulgaria's best course was reconciliation with Yugoslavia.¹⁴² Romanian, Turkish, and Greek criticism and fear of Bulgaria was unfounded, since Bulgarian armaments were no more than those of Yugoslavia. Peterson also believed that because of Bulgaria's late start at rearmament, due to the Neuilly Treaty, it was not to be feared. This pro-Bulgarian document even supported Bulgaria's claims to an Aegean port, which Peterson saw as possibly bolstering a weak economy. Peterson advocated British intervention to smooth over this rough spot in Balkan peace.

The year 1937 was the first in which a British diplomat, Peterson, took a decidedly pro-Bulgarian stance, and argued forcibly for Bulgaria to London. The reasons for supporting Bulgaria were consistently evident in the documents, which throughout the year discussed Britain's well-founded fears concerning German influence. Although the topic was not new, the treatment most decidedly was new. Peterson understood that Britain still had a chance at this point to limit German influence, but his arguments largely fell on deaf ears.

In 1938 the European diplomatic situation reached a boiling point. After Halifax's mission in November 1937, Chamberlain had effectively given Hitler a "free hand for Germany in the heart of Europe."¹⁴³ Germany changed its policy to match this idea, and the Anshluss of Austria and Germany followed in March 1938. Although the British government was shocked that it was accomplished forcefully, Chamberlain

¹⁴² "Eden to Peterson," 16 December 1937, *B DFA*, vol. 13, 235.

¹⁴³ George, *The Warped Vision*, 181.

looked the other way and resolved to be more appeasing in the future.¹⁴⁴ He had the opportunity to show this regarding Czechoslovakia, and Hitler's claims on the Sudetenland. Chamberlain believed nothing could stop this German conquest, short of war, and he was not willing to risk that to protect Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁵ Taking charge of this partitioning, Chamberlain was resolved to win a place in history and prevent further European war. He decided against joint action to stop Hitler, because in his mind the French were unreliable and the Soviets were unacceptable.¹⁴⁶ This left him no other option but to concede to Hitler. The Munich Agreement was, Chamberlain believed, the crowning glory of his career, since appeasing Hitler had averted a European conflict. This also marked a turning point, since from this point onward British public opinion swung decisively against appeasement to Hitler. By the end of 1938, Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement were being criticized by both the press and the general public.

Despite the tumultuous state of affairs in Europe throughout 1938, Bulgaria was relatively quiet. In January 1938 one government was replaced by another, and the first general elections since the coup were held. The government received a majority mandate for the nonparty system, and Boris called the twenty-fourth Sobranje to sit in Sofia. Boris continued to insist on a moderate domestic policy and a foreign policy of neutrality and friendship.¹⁴⁷ On a visit to Europe in August and September 1938, Chamberlain asked Boris to intervene in the Sudeten crisis and talk to Hitler. When he did, Boris felt

¹⁴⁴ For more information on appeasement see William R. Rock, *British Appeasement in the 1930s* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977).

¹⁴⁵ George, *The Warped Vision*, 184.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁷ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 242.

that by helping Britain he was also garnering aid for his own country; Boris also desperately wanted an agreement between Germany and Britain, two powers Bulgaria was honestly torn between. Boris argued to Hitler that it would be impossible to localize a conflict at this point, and that Britain would definitely be drawn in to any war.¹⁴⁸ It is difficult to say how much impact he had in redirecting Hitler towards the Munich conference, but Boris' honesty in arguing for peace probably did much to support the German dictator's fears of British intervention.

The first recorded document from 1938 was a memorandum sent by Chamberlain to his foreign ministers in Belgrade, Sofia, Budapest, and Athens. In this memorandum he told his ministers to observe Balkan governments to see whether they were trying to emulate Germany, or even whether they were acting under German control.¹⁴⁹ Although this warning came late, considering British ministers in Sofia were warning about this possibility years earlier, Chamberlain finally made it government policy to consider and attempt to counteract German influence in the Balkans. Following this was an affirmation from Peterson to Eden explaining that Bulgaria was moving away from an authoritative regime and back towards the constitutional government from before the 1934 coup. This was a direct answer to Chamberlain's inquiry of January, in which he wanted his ministers to tell him if the more authoritative regimes would support Germany. Peterson answered here that the trend current in Bulgaria was away from such authoritarianism. British documents from February 1938 tended to focus on the dismissal

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁴⁹ "Memorandum from Neville Chamberlain to Sir R. H. Campbell," 6 January 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 82.

of General Lukoff, former War Minister, because of his attempts to unite the Macedonian groups under him and the harm this was causing Bulgar-Yugoslav relations.¹⁵⁰

A dispatch from Athens to London claimed that British security in the Balkans could be achieved only by unifying Bulgaria with her neighbors, so that all the Balkan countries could provide a united Entente against Germany.¹⁵¹ Only through British influence could relations between Bulgaria and her neighbors be assisted, and this was the only way for Bulgaria to be attached to the Balkan Entente. Waterlow's report shows that Britain needed to take a more active and constructive policy in the Balkans, before it was too late. A study undertaken by Harold Nicolson described the feeling of Bulgaria towards Germany as "helpless anticipation."¹⁵² Although resigned to some degree of economic control by Germany, Bulgaria demonstrated a continued "desire for intimate and direct relations with London...almost embarrassing and takes extravagant forms." Nicolson's recognition of this spoke volumes about the desire of Boris to ally Bulgaria with Britain, and the latter's relative inaction to secure this alliance. Economic reports for 1938 show continued German economic and psychological holds on Danubian markets, with advances expected due to unification with Austria.¹⁵³ German propaganda

¹⁵⁰ "Report from Colonel Ross to Maurice Peterson," 9 February 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 120.

¹⁵¹ "Report from Sydney Waterlow to Viscount Halifax," 7 April 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 127.

¹⁵² "Report from Harold Nicolson to Robert Vansittart," 2 May 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 137.

¹⁵³ "Memorandum on German Economic Penetration in Central and South-East Europe," 2 May 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 139.

in Sofia was dramatically increased in May 1938, as Germany began stressing the ties between the losers in World War I.¹⁵⁴

A conversation between G. W. Rendel, the final British ambassador in Sofia prior to World War II, and King Boris dealt with the latter signing a non-aggression pact with members of the Balkan Entente.¹⁵⁵ Boris continued to believe that he could not abandon Bulgaria's territorial goals, but that signing a mildly binding non-aggression pact would help insure Balkan and European peace. The king of Bulgaria expressed his honest opinions about many things to Rendel, among them the dislike of the French government with Bulgaria's not joining the Balkan Entente and Boris' concern over the current revisionist hysteria in Germany. Boris also talked about the possibility of strengthening Anglo-Bulgarian trade relations, even if only to establish a counterpoise to Germany's hold over Bulgaria's economy. Rendel stalled by telling him that there were many obstacles to overcome first, which was an argument not that dissimilar from those given by British diplomats earlier. Britain effectively said that they recognized Bulgaria's problems and needs, but that at the current time British interests were not served by assisting Bulgaria. Despite the fact that in a later document both Rendel and his American colleague recognized the role played by Boris in defusing the last European crisis, Britain was far too interested in its own affairs to ever really be the impartial guide that it pretended to be in the Balkans. This became known, or at least suspected, in Bulgaria by the end of 1938.

¹⁵⁴ "Report from Edward Coote to Viscount Halifax," 7 May 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 152.

¹⁵⁵ "Report from G. W. Rendel to Viscount Halifax," 21 July 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 178.

In a conversation between Rendel and M. George Govedaroff, Bulgarian President of the Foreign Affairs Commission, Govedaroff asked Rendel what the real attitude of the British government was towards Bulgaria. He even asked why Britain was showing “an apparent lack of interest” in Bulgaria, in comparison to other Balkan countries.¹⁵⁶ Rendel diverted the answer by saying that Bulgaria had been neglected only because of the grave international situation. Govedaroff asked if it would be possible to give the Bulgarian people some hope that territorial revision was being considered, and Rendel explained that it is hardly the place of Britain to solve these problems. Reading between the lines, one can see that Govedaroff was trying to acquire some hope that he could pass along to the people, but that Britain foolishly refused to allow them even that. This failure to show even the slightest courtesy or thought toward a Bulgarian regime already under fire for not seeking Bulgarian-populated lands, would only weaken the government and add fuel to the fire of those supporting Germany. After the Munich Agreement, dangerous irredentist sentiments were stirred up in Bulgaria concerning the Southern Dobrudja.¹⁵⁷ Rather than helping the Bulgarian government calm these agitators, by allowing them to give the people hope of future territorial revision, Britain’s lack of assistance merely made the agitators more credible and gain more support.

Europe was rent asunder by another World War in 1939, one much more disastrous than the first. The British public continued their criticism of Chamberlain and appeasement, especially after his recognition of Franco as head of state in Spain and

¹⁵⁶ “Rendel to Halifax,” 31 December 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 78.

¹⁵⁷ “Rendel to Halifax,” 19 November 1938, *BDF*, vol. 14, 238.

inaction as Germany took the remainder of Czechoslovakia.¹⁵⁸ By the end of March, Chamberlain realized that Hitler had been using him and his desire to avoid war to do whatever he wanted in Europe. Swiftly catering to public opinion, Chamberlain pledged British support to Poland after Hitler made overtures for Danzig and the Polish Corridor, and pledged support to Greece, Turkey, and Romania in the Balkans. It is interesting to note that no pledge of support was offered to Bulgaria. Although Chamberlain was hoping to call Hitler's bluff and avert war, Chamberlain refused to consider any alliance with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁹ After a period of saber rattling, Germany invaded Poland on September 1 and Britain declared war on Germany September 3. The final year of Chamberlain's rule saw the British doubts concerning his ability to lead come to pass, as he waged a limited war until his removal in May 1940.¹⁶⁰

Boris saw the approaching war, and decided as early as the summer of 1939 that "Bulgaria was to remain neutral, to stay out of the conflict at any cost."¹⁶¹ This was done to counter the triple threats of growing Bulgarian revisionism, the destructiveness of a war in the Balkans, and the spread of Communism in Bulgaria. Indeed, Boris privately declared that he feared the Soviets more than the fascists, because the Soviets would destroy everything he had worked towards. Domestically, this year saw the average Bulgarian standard of living rise, and the majority of the population still seemed to support Boris and Kiosseivanov. Relations with other Balkan powers, if strained by the

¹⁵⁸ George, *The Warped Vision*, 197.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁶¹ Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 257.

approaching war, were cordial enough.¹⁶² Tension appeared to be brewing in the Bulgarian cabinet, between English, German, French, and Russian sympathizers. Each group thought the power they supported could best help Bulgaria fulfill its national goals. Rather than alienating some ministers and dragging the country into war, Boris decided to maneuver between the Great Powers.¹⁶³

The only wild card in this strategy was Hitler; at this time, he was not pushing a formal military alliance. But Hitler explained to Kiosseivanov in a meeting that the world could be split into revisionist and status quo countries, with all of each destined to end up grouped with those like them.¹⁶⁴ He was telling Bulgaria subtly that eventually Bulgaria and Germany would end up on the same side again. After this talk, German shipments of weapons to Bulgaria increased. Two weeks after World War II broke out, Boris officially declared Bulgaria neutral and the leaders of the Great Powers approved of this position. The year ended with Boris calling the twenty-fifth Sobranje in Sofia, and the replacement of Kiosseivanov with Bogdan Filov in the position of Prime Minister.

Boris began to have real doubts about British feelings towards Bulgaria in 1939, as reflected in several British documents, but despite this he endeavored to remain neutral throughout the conflict. Perhaps part of his doubts came from the fact that in February 1939, Britain started offering assurances to Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia that Britain would not support Bulgarian claims for a port on the Aegean. Documents from later in the year then promised British support for most Balkan countries, regardless of whether

¹⁶² Ibid., 258.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 259.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 260.

they joined the war or remain neutral, with the exception of Bulgaria. Bulgaria later discovered this, and received a less than satisfactory answer from the British as to why this was done.

The first communication from Bulgaria in January 1939 had Boris once again patiently explaining that agitation was growing over the Southern Dobrudja, and that he may not be able to control the agitation indefinitely.¹⁶⁵ Rendel explained that Britain could not help them, because that might cause Hungary to begin making similar requests to Romania. Boris understood Rendel's point, but Boris also must have wondered why, considering all the land that was given to Hitler, the British were now trying to control irredentism. Boris explained that the recovery of the Southern Dobrudja would placate Bulgarian irredentism for fifty years, but also warned that if Hungarian claims were recognized before Bulgarian claims that he could not be responsible for his country's actions. British policy perhaps became apparent when one considers a report from Lord Halifax to Rendel, in which the former hinted that Boris and Kiossevanov could restrain irredentist feeling in Bulgaria indefinitely. Rendel responded that this was simply not true, and accused Halifax of disregarding the danger of a hostile Bulgaria.¹⁶⁶ Halifax offered three reasons why Bulgaria should not be given the Southern Dobrudja: first, that this would most likely not cause Bulgaria to give up other territorial claims; second, that advancing any of these claims would antagonize Greece and Romania, and it was more

¹⁶⁵ "Rendel to Halifax," 15 January 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 88.

¹⁶⁶ "Halifax to Rendel," 13 February 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 98.

important to have the Balkan Entente on Britain's side than Bulgaria; finally, that any revision in the Dobrudja region would agitate all revisionist powers.¹⁶⁷

Rendel's reply to these comments was important, as he became the most vocal supporter of maintaining strong relations with Bulgaria. Rendel countered by explaining that the Dobrudja claim was very different from all other Bulgarian claims in that it was the only one almost universally considered valid.¹⁶⁸ He continued by showing that the Balkan Entente, while important, was created for the sole purpose of keeping Bulgaria under control. This was now a concern only of Greece, which continued to frustrate all Bulgarian efforts at cordial relations because of suspicions dating back to World War I. Great Britain had been derelict in its duty as a Great Power by taking a hands-off policy and allowing this to occur. If Great Britain were to take charge in a settling of these questions, not only would Bulgaria be made a certain ally but Britain could insure that Bulgaria's settlement was not enough to antagonize other countries. If this was done, Rendel believed Bulgaria would be willing to renounce other territorial claims, guarantee Romania against Hungarian and possibly even German attack, and act as impartial facilitator between Romania and Poland or Greece and Turkey. The force with which Rendel implored his British colleagues to action on Bulgaria's behalf was astounding, and showed that only Rendel grasped the tentative nature of the British-Bulgarian link.

Rendel's reports on discussions with King Boris and Kiosseivanov further illustrated how unstable the Bulgarian political scene was, and how these men nevertheless continued to try to come to terms with Britain. Boris described his 1939

¹⁶⁷ "Halifax to Rendel," 16 February 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 102.

¹⁶⁸ "Rendel to Halifax," 27 February 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 110.

visits with Mussolini in great detail, almost sounding like a spy for Britain, in which he tried to persuade Mussolini towards moderation.¹⁶⁹ These same documents recounted Boris' disappointment at the continually frustrated relations with Greece and Romania. A later conversation between Kiosseivanov and Rendel convinced Rendel that Boris and Kiosseivanov might not remain in control much longer without assistance of some kind. Rendel reported that the general mobilization by Romania in the Southern Dobrudja was only provoking Bulgarian extremists, whom Kiosseivanov believed would be silenced by even a small concession from Romania.¹⁷⁰ Kiosseivanov explained that he and Boris knew that siding with Germany would destroy Bulgarian independence, but that as the people become more and more agitated it would be harder to restrain them. The following day, a Romanian-German Economic Agreement was signed, which placed Romania "virtually under German control."¹⁷¹ Boris lamented that as other Great Powers seemed to have abandoned the Balkans, and since Balkan Powers have been unable to settle their differences and provide a common resistance, that Bulgaria may not be able to stand up to Germany. A conversation between Rendel and his Belgian and American colleagues led Rendel to conclude that if Bulgaria fell, there was a good chance Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey would be taken also.

Rendel reported to Halifax that gradually the Bulgarian people had come to see force as the only means to redress Bulgaria's territorial grievances, especially after recent

¹⁶⁹ "Rendel to Halifax," 11 March 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 126.

¹⁷⁰ "Rendel to Halifax," 23 March 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 133.

¹⁷¹ "Rendel to Halifax," 24 March 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 134.

Hungarian acquisitions.¹⁷² It should be noted that the Hungarian grievances were the same ones the British used as excuses to avoid returning the Dobrudja to Bulgaria; evidently, Hungary merited special treatment that Bulgaria did not. Although Rendel said that the majority of the people were still against a firm alliance with Germany, he believed Britain had treated Bulgaria as “an ex-enemy country” and had treated Bulgaria negatively this past year. Such insubordination was rare among British diplomats, as was his comparison of the Dobrudja to France’s claim on Alsace-Lorraine. Halifax’s response to all of this was that Bulgarian revisionism was scaring the Balkan Entente and should be quieted before it was too late. This seemed to settle the question once and for all that the Balkan Entente was considered more important by London.¹⁷³ Rendel replied that a German-Bulgarian economic agreement was in the works, similar to the Romanian one, which would practically make Bulgaria a German puppet.¹⁷⁴ Boris had openly admitted to trying to meet the Germans halfway, so he could maintain some control over his country. The Bulgarian Minister to London continued to plead for the creation of an Anglo-Bulgarian trading organization to counteract the German organization, and Rendel believed “it now seems more important than ever that we should at least make some gesture to show that we are not as indifferent to German penetration in this country than we seem to be.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² “Rendel to Halifax,” 23 March 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 138.

¹⁷³ “Halifax to Rendel,” 1 April 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 139.

¹⁷⁴ “Rendel to Halifax,” 5 April 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 140.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

A report from the military attaché, Colonel Ross, showed that the men actually on the scene in Sofia in 1939 were convinced Britain was making an error in failing to insure Bulgarian support.¹⁷⁶ Ross said that British policy towards Bulgaria consisted of “doing little to assist her...and hoping that she will be good and quiet” and he reported that it was surprising the Bulgarians still wanted to work with Britain.¹⁷⁷ Following his remarks was a survey of what to expect if Bulgaria became a hostile power, an allied power, or a neutral power in a possible war. Most interesting are his concluding remarks, in which he stated that instead of telling Boris to calm the Bulgarian people, as Britain was currently doing, Greece should stop regarding Bulgaria as an enemy and taking antagonistic steps. Greece would be better advised to prepare her defenses against Italy, and not Bulgaria. Around the same time as this report the Foreign Office received a number of reports from other Balkan ministries, in which these ministries discuss their various countries stalling of any efforts made by Great Britain to urge them to come to terms with Bulgaria. This shows that Ross’s report was taken seriously, but that Britain failed to exercise any diplomatic muscle to alleviate Balkan tensions. Even Halifax, in a report to Rendel, claimed to be advising the British government in favor of granting Bulgaria credit; the British government remained hesitant, avoiding any entanglement with Bulgaria until an agreement could be reached that satisfied the Balkan Entente.¹⁷⁸ Rendel followed up this claim by urging that Britain buy Bulgarian produce to alleviate the “present German stranglehold,” and explaining that the economic cost now would be

¹⁷⁶ “Ross to Rendel,” 7 April 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 149.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ “Halifax to Rendel,” 21 April 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 154.

much less than the cost of fighting Bulgaria.¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the offer of British credit was soon withdrawn and the internal climate in Bulgaria steadily turned towards Germany.¹⁸⁰ Unrest reached an unprecedented high after the murder of 22 Bulgarians in the Dobrudja region by Romanian police. It was crucial, in Rendel's eyes, to stop the movement of Bulgaria towards the revisionist camp. Although no formal proposals had been made, Rendel expected that as war drew closer and closer the Germans would endeavor to inextricably link Bulgaria to the Axis Powers.¹⁸¹

Rendel felt that most damaging of all was the way Boris and Kiosseivanov were being viewed by the people of Bulgaria and abroad.¹⁸² The Balkan countries viewed all actions of Bulgaria with suspicion, and the French considered Boris an ally of Germany because of his father's actions in 1914. More problematic was the fact that the great majority of the Bulgarian people, who were now pro-German, believed Boris to be a Germanophile. Rendel begged the British government to disregard this when choosing a course of action in the Balkans. He offered as evidence of Bulgaria's neutrality reports from a visit Kiosseivanov made to Berlin, in which he convinced Hitler to accept that Bulgaria needed to remain neutral in any future conflicts.¹⁸³ Hitler told Kiosseivanov that if Bulgaria wanted territorial revisions, it must negotiate from a position of superiority; also, Hitler informed him that Germany would not back Bulgaria's territorial revisions,

¹⁷⁹ "Rendel to Halifax," 23 April 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 155.

¹⁸⁰ "Rendel to Halifax," 22 April 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 158.

¹⁸¹ "Rendel to Halifax," 26 June 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 199.

¹⁸² "Rendel to Halifax," 15 July 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 210.

¹⁸³ "Halifax to Rendel," 26 July 1939, *BDFFA*, vol. 15, 212.

despite the German public's approval of Bulgaria. In all of the remaining documents of 1939, Boris or Kiosseivanov reiterated to Rendel their sincere desire to remain neutral in any upcoming conflict, and not repeat the mistake made in World War I.¹⁸⁴

Rendel's report on Bulgarian public opinion reveals the dangerous position Boris was putting himself in, once the war had begun. Bulgarians generally saw the war as being a contest of revisionist versus status quo countries, believing that revisionist powers never had a chance under the treaties of the Paris Peace Conference. This caused them to favor the revisionists' camp.¹⁸⁵ These same Bulgarians criticized the British for not forcing minor revisions which might have stabilized the European peace; Rendel's excuse to Boris, that German policy made such minor revisions impossible, was rightly seen as fallacious. Later, British pressure forced Boris and Kiosseivanov to issue a document of neutrality, which a small but growing number of Bulgarians opposed.¹⁸⁶ The concluding documents focused on growing Soviet influence in the region due to the Russo-German pacts. Boris maintained that both Russia and Germany were concerns to Bulgarian independence, but that cultural revivals of both groups' followings in Bulgaria followed the signing of these pacts.¹⁸⁷ Rendel believed that the King was losing prestige in the country, because of his continued refusal to side with Germany or Russia. If this continued, Boris could find himself deposed or worse. Rendel concluded his 1939 reports with the fervent belief that Boris could be protected and Bulgarian sympathies

¹⁸⁴ "Rendel to Halifax," 1 September 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 231.

¹⁸⁵ "Rendel to Halifax," 7 September 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 237.

¹⁸⁶ "Rendel to Halifax," 11 September 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 240.

¹⁸⁷ "Rendel to Halifax," 3 December 1939, *B DFA*, vol. 15, 280.

turned if a show of support came from the Allied Powers.¹⁸⁸ This might help, but Rendel worried that the spread of Russian influence into the Balkans already made it predetermined that Bulgaria would “fall under complete Soviet control”.

When the war began, King Boris had two goals on his mind: to keep Bulgaria out of the war at any cost, and to revise the Treaty of Neuilly by peaceful means.¹⁸⁹ He told many of his advisors that he knew Hitler and those allied with him would lose. In September 1939 Britain began the construction of a neutral bloc in the Balkans, which could have included Bulgaria by returning the Southern Dobrudja to it. Romanian intransigence on this point also poisoned covert British overtures to Greece in regard to Bulgaria getting a port on the Aegean coast.¹⁹⁰ The British government never formally extended an invitation to Bulgaria to join this neutral bloc, although an invitation that came from the Turkish Foreign Minister was probably extended at British urging. Even though the British now began buying Bulgarian produce, and told Boris they wanted expanded economic links to Bulgaria, in many ways it was too little, too late, as the Germans remained the biggest buyer of Bulgarian goods.¹⁹¹ German propaganda in Bulgaria was far more influential than BBC propaganda; the Germans revived fears from World War I to further heighten the tension between the pro-Allied Powers government and the pro-Axis Powers people. The British also made their fears concerning Russia

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Stoian Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations during the Second World War (1939-1944)* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1981), 12, quoted from Foreign Office, *AHI-BAS*, “Letter from Rendel to Halifax,” October 24, 1939.

¹⁹⁰ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 14.

¹⁹¹ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 16, quoted from Foreign Office, *AHI-BAS*, “Foreign Office minutes of a statement by Cadogan,” October 27, 1939.

known to the Bulgarian government, frowning on the January 1940 trade treaty between the two countries.¹⁹² Instead, they encouraged Bulgaria to strengthen ties to British-dominated Turkey, once it became clear no progress was being made with Romania and once the British dropped their plans for a neutral bloc.¹⁹³

Early in 1940, Boris and the new Prime Minister Bogdan Filov continued sending Britain assurances of their neutrality. This was only possible at this time because Hitler had his attention elsewhere.¹⁹⁴ By the autumn of 1940, after Winston Churchill's May election as Prime Minister, Hitler had redoubled his efforts to entice Balkan powers to his side. Hitler used his control over Romania to return Transylvania to Hungary, and on September 7, 1940, he returned the Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria.¹⁹⁵ Belatedly, the Allied Powers recognized these transactions to save face with Bulgaria. As pressure from Hitler mounted, more and more members of the Bulgarian government turned pro-German. By January 1941, Boris was threatened by German transportation needs to reach Greece, British fears about the Balkans, and Soviet fears about containing German influence.¹⁹⁶ Filov tried to explain to Boris that Britain and the Soviet Union had nothing to offer Bulgaria, while German aid could help them; Boris realized at this point that

¹⁹² Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 23.

¹⁹³ For more information on Britain's actions in Bulgaria at this time see George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service, 1913-1954* (London: J. Murray, 1957).

¹⁹⁴ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 29.

¹⁹⁵ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 36, quoted from *Istoria Vtoroy Mirovoy Voyny 1939-1945*, vol. 3 (Moscow: 1974), 256.

¹⁹⁶ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 40.

German troops would come through Bulgaria, with or without his consent, but if he worked with the Germans perhaps he could control their influence.¹⁹⁷ On January 20, 1941, Boris signed a pact with Hitler to allow German troops to pass through Bulgaria. Soon after, British Special Operations Executives began planning simultaneous coup d'états for Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to install pro-British governments.¹⁹⁸

These orchestrated coups were scheduled for April 12, 1941, proving that Britain had lost all hope of recruiting Bulgaria, or keeping them neutral. Perhaps if Britain was only considering Boris's signing the January 20 pact with Germany, this policy seems logical, but that ignores the fact that Boris made one condition of his signing the fact that no Bulgarian troops would be used in battle. On February 1, 1941, Boris signed the Newbacher agreement, which allowed German troops to be stationed on Bulgarian soil.¹⁹⁹ The Newbacher agreement directly threatened other powers around Bulgaria, and almost certainly tied the country to Germany for the duration of the war. In the second half of February, the coup to overthrow the king and his ministers was discovered, completing the transformation of the Bulgarian public into ardent German supporters.²⁰⁰ With news that German forces would cross the Danube on March 2, with or without Bulgarian approval, Bogdan Filov signed the Tripartite Pact on March 1 to inextricably link Bulgaria with Germany. This essentially turned Bulgaria into a German satellite, as almost 700,000 German troops moved in, and led to diplomatic ties between Britain and

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹⁹ Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations*, 47, quoted from D. Kosn, *Ograbvaneto I Razoryavaneto Na Bulgarskoto Stoopanstvo ot Germanskite Imperialisti Prez Vtorate Svetovna Voina* (Sofia: 1966), 100.

Bulgaria being severed March 5. Although Bulgaria would benefit from Germany redressing all their territorial claims, their alliance would cost them dearly and cost King Boris his life.

In the end, it remains a failing of Britain that Bulgaria was not convinced to join the Allies. It is obvious that Boris did his best, up until March 1941, to keep Bulgaria neutral. These efforts were even made long after it became apparent Britain could offer little in the way of help. The last minister in Sofia, Rendel, argued passionately on behalf of Bulgaria's claims, and in favor of recruiting Bulgaria as an allied power. Other ministers throughout the 1930s reported on numerous Bulgarian attempts to establish strong ties with Britain, which showed an enormous capacity to suffer in silence while ignored.

Conclusion

What can account for this failure in British foreign policy? Perhaps the British government did not believe there was ever a risk of Bulgaria joining the Axis powers, but this idea can be discounted. For one thing, the correspondence for the last three years prior to the war was filled with British questions and Bulgarian assurances regarding neutrality. The British repeatedly inquired, throughout all of 1938-1940, as to Bulgaria's intentions. This shows that the British government did not entirely discount the possibility of Bulgaria joining Germany. The later reports from Rendel even state that unless something was done to appease the Bulgarian public, such as a territorial revision, Boris and Kiosseivanov would have little choice but to follow public opinion to the side of Germany. Unfortunately, the British government was either too preoccupied or not

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

concerned enough with keeping Bulgaria happy to force any revision. It seems that Britain was most interested in Bulgaria as another member of a Balkan bloc, which might have been able to stand up to Germany. Once this bloc seemed impossible, then the British lost interest in Bulgaria. Another problem were suspicions held by some in the Foreign Office that Bulgaria was professing neutrality to the British while negotiating territorial revisions with Germany.²⁰¹ Suspicions like these helped poison relations, and led the British to conclude that their interests in Bulgaria were best served by assisting a coup; the attempted coup turned the Bulgarians irrevocably to the German side.

This explains why events unfolded the way they did in the final years before the war, but why did the British not act sooner to secure Bulgaria? The answer can be found in the workings of the British government, which predetermined that a country like Bulgaria would be given secondary consideration and essentially neglected. In an age in which the mightiest and most threatening powers were given whatever they wanted to avert the horrors of total war, Bulgaria just did not rank as a major threat. Until war with German became seen as definite, which was not until 1938 or 1939, Bulgaria was politely ignored or stalled in regard to her territorial claims. The pacifistic tendencies of the British government insured that the policy of appeasement would develop from a country already war-weary. Once this policy became practice, larger powers stole the spotlight and attention from lesser ones such as Bulgaria. British officials honestly thought that because Bulgaria adhered to the League of Nations and international law so religiously under Boris, that Boris could continue to run the country in a similar fashion despite not

²⁰¹ "Letter from Viscount Halifax to Mr. Norton," 11 July 1939, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* Series III, Volume VI (1939), ed. E. L. Woodward and Roban Butler (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953), 293.

receiving territorial compensation. Britain learned far too late that Boris, like the British officials themselves, was a politician and depended on the people for his power. He squandered his reserves of good will trying to wait out the British government's promises.

This accounts for part of Britain's failing, but a more pressing problem existed in the British government and Foreign Office. The animosity between foreign secretaries and the prime ministers in 1930s Britain was staggering, and surely injured attempts to construct coherent foreign policy. Evidence can be found to indicate alarming incompetence in at least one of the ministers serving in Bulgaria, while another seemed only to use the post to secure a better position for himself.

The most famous example of antagonism between a Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister was Anthony Eden and Chamberlain. Chamberlain became Prime Minister on 28 May 1937. Anthony Eden had been Foreign Secretary since 22 December 1935.²⁰² Eden rose after the fall of Samuel Hoare, after the British government dismissed the Hoare-Laval plans of 1935. Eden was an obvious force in the Foreign Office from 1931-1938, and he seemed a logical and strong replacement for Hoare. Confusion over the changing European situation, and Eden's youth, led to the appointment of Lord Halifax as Lord Privy Seal. This would cause problems, as the two men had overlapping responsibilities. Eden began his run of the Foreign Office believing that a strong stand needed to be taken against Italy concerning the recent Abyssinia intrigue. Upon Robert Vansittart's suggestion, in his capacity as Diplomatic Advisor to the British Government,

²⁰² A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office, 1931-1938* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 150.

that a comprehensive settlement be reached with Germany, Eden agreed but warned lest this action “stimulates the appetite it is intended to satisfy.”²⁰³ He once described the policy of Britain towards the growth of Nazism as “dilatatory,” and found this unacceptable.²⁰⁴ His stronger stance in the mid-1930s perhaps led to the stalling policy adopted by Bulgarian ministers of these years, in which they never outright rejected Bulgarian territorial claims but merely asked for more time. This led him into conflict with other British officials in the late 1930s. The first conflict came when Eden instructed all British ambassadors to refuse recognition of Italian conquests in Ethiopia.²⁰⁵ Unfortunately, within a few months British ambassadors began suggesting that de jure recognition be granted, to ease the tension between Italy and Britain. Against Eden’s advice, Chamberlain followed the ambassadors advice late in 1937.

This marked the beginning of a series of conflicts between the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, which would make a coherent and logical foreign policy impossible. The main issue the two men disagreed on was that Chamberlain, bringing his business background to his position, expected the dictators to be reasonable men that he could bargain with. Eden, who had served as Britain’s representative to the League of Nations and knew the European dictators personally, knew this to be false. Chamberlain intended to secure the good will of Italy and Germany through whatever means necessary, as long as they did not involve war. Eden argued against such measures, and

²⁰³ Ibid., 173.

²⁰⁴ Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 28.

²⁰⁵ “Letter from Eden to Roberts,” 14 January 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* Series II, Volume XVII (1937), ed. W. N. Medlicott and Douglas Dakin (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1980), 65.

it was for this reason that early in 1938 Chamberlain began wooing Germany, Italy, and Japan without consulting his Foreign Secretary.²⁰⁶ Chamberlain and Lord Halifax were concerned with not missing opportunities to insure peace, while Eden sought to increase British military strength to make them equals of Germany. Only in this position could meaningful dialogue be undertaken. Halifax was sent to Germany in 1937, without Eden's knowledge or consent, to try to make an agreement with Hitler. When Eden found out that Chamberlain's policy differed from his own, and that other ministers of the Foreign Office were constructing a policy with Chamberlain instead of himself, Eden resigned.²⁰⁷ Chamberlain installed Halifax, who he knew would follow any policy he set, into the office of Foreign Secretary. The rivalry and petty betrayals Chamberlain undertook while Eden was Foreign Secretary made for extremely unreliable foreign policy; Eden believed that he was acting with Chamberlain's consent, while Chamberlain took measures to oppose and restrict Eden. Although these two men openly disagreed only over policy towards Germany and Italy, the conflict between them certainly confused other ministers and distracted both men from other concerns, such as Bulgaria.

Other problems concerning specific ministers and their relations to Bulgaria show that several British officials demonstrated a real lack of competence. Alexander Cadogan, who was transferred in February 1936 from his post in China into the position of Deputy Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, immediately ran afoul of Permanent

²⁰⁶ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 95.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

Under-Secretary Vansittart and Anthony Eden.²⁰⁸ Cadogan suggested that the various peace treaties from World War I should be completely revised. The disorganization of the Foreign Office also contributed to poor British policy in these years. Vansittart refused to retire from office, so a new post was created for him when Cadogan was promoted to Permanent Under-Secretary.²⁰⁹ Cadogan's memoirs indicate that he shared Eden's thoughts regarding European matters, but resolutely stood by the Prime Minister and refused to express his views. Eden was left standing alone against the British government, but also gave Chamberlain the impression that his policies were favored by the majority of other officials. Cadogan generally ignored Bulgaria and Balkan affairs, which in itself says something about the focus of the British government, but his reports are interesting in what they reveal about him and his feelings towards the Balkans.

Cadogan's diary is full of petty comments regarding Eden's incompetence or Vansittart's promotion.²¹⁰ Even after the outbreak of war, he tended to focus on personal rivalries and feelings about different British officials, revealing a serious lack of priorities in this well-placed British foreign official. For a man whose duties included briefing the Prime Minister when Eden was abroad, he certainly seemed to ignore the bigger problem of global war and instead focused on advancing his career. This may account for some of the Foreign Office's ineffectiveness. Also, his personal feelings towards the Balkans and Bulgaria were incredibly condescending. While ministers in Sofia reported of "the privilege" of speaking to King Boris, Cadogan referred to a talk the two men had in the

²⁰⁸ Sir Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M. 1938-1945*, edited by David Dilks (New York: Putnam, 1972), 12.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 294.

crucial summer of 1938 as “a waste of time.”²¹¹ Later, when he tried to convince Boris to fight Germany, it did not seem like such a waste of time. By the start of 1941, Cadogan made entries like “All these Balkan people are trash” because they were folding to Hitler.²¹² Perhaps it was just anger speaking, but perhaps a more deep-seated feeling of the British was elicited here. If a feeling such as this was held by several officials, it helps explain why the Balkans in general, and especially an old enemy like Bulgaria, received only secondary consideration. Even if these feelings were unique only to him, it certainly does not paint a picture of a very stable, efficient, or objective diplomat.²¹³

An even more blatant display of incompetence can be seen in the memoirs of the First Secretary in Sofia, John Balfour, who served 1932-1936. As First Secretary, he was responsible for deciding which communications were sent to the Foreign Office in London and which remained in Sofia. He devoted only a few pages in his memoirs to his post in Sofia, despite the fact that he was there four years. He also demonstrated a rather poor grasp on affairs in Bulgaria, despite having an excellent station chief, Sydney Waterlow. Waterlow’s reports provided accurate representations of life and problems in Bulgaria, yet Balfour misrepresented Boris’s political position by grouping him with IMRO, which Waterlow had shown in his reports to be false.²¹⁴ Balfour recounted no details of these years, despite the fact that in the years he served in Sofia there were two

²¹¹ Ibid., 95.

²¹² Ibid., 365.

²¹³ For more information on the British Foreign Office see *The Foreign Office, 1782-1982*, ed. Roger Bullon (Frederick, MD: University Publishers of America, 1984).

²¹⁴ John Balfour, *Not Too Correct an Aureole: The Recollections of a Diplomat* (The Chantry: Michael Russell Ltd., 1983), 54.

coups, Germany established an economic stranglehold over Bulgaria, and relations between Bulgaria and other Balkan powers improved. This seems surprising, until one encounters a story that he does recount from January 1, 1935. At a state function in Sofia, the Italian minister mentioned that Italy would soon invade Abyssinia after provoking a few border incidents as justification.²¹⁵ This Italian minister asked Balfour if Britain would object to this, and Balfour told him certainly. Balfour, however, chose not to report this conversation to his superiors in London, because it fell outside of his Bulgarian post. His silence casts severe doubts on his competence and reliability as a minister for the British Foreign Office, if he refused to report news that almost caused a war.²¹⁶ Perhaps other British ministers were similarly incompetent, and helped Britain pursue an erratic and unsuccessful policy in Bulgaria and Europe.

These are only possible solutions to the British failure in Bulgaria, but they are the best explanation for the problems in British foreign policy in general prior to World War II. Because of the factions and disagreements in the British Foreign Office, and the incompetence and selfishness of key ministers, British foreign policy found itself ill equipped to deal with the crises of the 1930s. Because it was so ill-equipped to deal with major European issues such as Nazi Germany and Italy, its policy towards smaller, less-demanding countries such as Bulgaria suffered; consequently, British policy in the years prior to World War II failed to keep Bulgaria from joining the Axis Powers.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

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