

Sebess, Pedro. 2020. *Így dőlt el Magyarország sorsa: Három eltérő elképzelés a háború utáni világrendről – Sztálin, Churchill és Roosevelt* ('How Hungary's Fate was Sealed: Three Conflicting Views of the World Order After the War – Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt'). Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó. 269 pp.

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Pedro Sebess originally published his book about World War II Hungary in Spanish, in Argentina, with the title: *Stalin, Churchill Y Roosevelt Tres Visiones Sobre El Orden Mundial De Posguerra Y El Destino De Hungría*. The translation of this book into Hungarian was carried out in an effective direct style by Péter Kiss and Nóra Szekér. The result is a user-friendly, good read. As the title indicates, the book focuses on the role of the period's major powers and their policy objectives during World War II, and on how all these determined Hungary's future.

Sebess begins his analysis by delineating Hungary's geopolitical status following World War I and the French inspired and imposed Treaty of Trianon (1920). This dictated treaty contradicted the Wilsonian war aims of self-determination of peoples, which was meant to replace the defeated imperial orders of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Ottoman centers of power. As a result of this re-ordering, the author points out, Hungary was the big loser, as it lost 71.4% of its territory and 60% of its population, including three million ethnic Hungarians. But, as he also points out, in the long run all the inhabitants of the region were losers, because the punitive character of the treaty led Hungary and other revisionist states to work for its overthrow. This in turn led to the horrors of World War II and its aftermath, to which Sebess devotes most of his study, particularly to the wartime decisions of the Big Three, the United States, Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R.

The present study is well documented with the perspectives of the major decision-makers based on sources and documents close to the scene. Regarding Roosevelt, the author draws on the perspectives of his son, Elliott Roosevelt, as well as on those of his close associates like Harry Hopkins and Canada's Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. For Churchill, the author draws on the Prime Minister's own writings as on those of his private secretary John Colville, the perspectives of Anthony Eden, and the diaries of the permanent British Foreign Office Secretary Sir Alexander Cadogan. For Stalin, Chuev Feliks's interpretations via the

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Molotov interview and Stephen Kotkin's analysis are particularly insightful. All these are tied together with the classical writings of John Lukacs, Liddell Hart, Nigel Hamilton, and C.A. Macartney and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's interpreter, diplomat Charles E. Bohlen. In contrast, when exploring the efforts of Italy, Hungary and Romania to find a way out of the alliance with Hitler's Germany, the author depends also on diaries and protocols. These include the diaries of Galeazzo Ciano, Miklós Horthy, Miklós Kállay, and Joseph Goebbels, as well as the records of the 1945-6 International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg. In addition, Sebess supplements all these with the recollections of Zsuzsanna Bonczos, the wife of Jenő Zilahi-Sebess, the author's father and the official sent in June 1943 by the Kállay administration to Istanbul to contact the Allies regarding Hungarian peace prospects.

After September 1, 1939, after the appeasement policies of France and the British Empire failed to stop Hitler's march to war, with Austria's incorporation into the Third Reich, following the destruction of Czechoslovakia and the Wehrmacht's defeat of Polish military forces, Hungary found itself wedged in between Germany and the Soviet Union. As Winston Churchill conceded at that point: in the direct shadow of the Third Reich, Hungary could no longer follow an openly anti-German policy. Furthermore, until that time, Hungary's revisionist policies received the support of both Italy and, to a lesser extent, Germany. However, its efforts to overcome the losses of Trianon put the Hungarian government on a one-way track leading it to the position of a German satellite status.

In June 1941, after Hitler abandoned the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact (of August 1939) and attacked the USSR, in his desperation, Stalin turned to the Western Allies asking them to open a second front against the German onslaught at Archangel in the north, or in the Caucasus, or in the Balkans. His objective at that time was to survive the seemingly unstoppable German advance. However, as soon as the German advance faltered on the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow, Stalin changed his tune. From this point and on, he continued to press for the opening of a second front in the West, far from direct Soviet spheres of interest. From that time, for Stalin the Balkans were no longer a desirable option for a Western landing.

Unlike Stalin, Winston Churchill remained steadfast in his support for opening a Balkan front. Churchill was aware of the legacy of Russian expansionism and realized that the Dardanelles, the Balkans and Central Europe were all in the crosshairs of the Soviet advance once the tide of war had turned in Stalin's favor. However, Churchill also realized that the determination of Allied strategy was dependent on the industrial might of the United States and the massive manpower sacrifices of the Soviet Union. He knew that he could not convince Stalin of the wisdom of a Balkan landing, so he concentrated his efforts on Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Roosevelt, for his part, was not committed to a European geo-political perspective. From the moment the U.S. entered the war, he thought it his destiny to establish a new global order. Intent on achieving this end, he saw the old British and French empires as obstacles. During the course of the war Roosevelt was constantly exerting pressure on the British to cede more power and self-government to India in the face of Japanese expansion in South-East Asia and Burma. At the same time, he envisioned the United Nations as an organization established for the sake of stabilizing world peace and order under the direction of the four major regional powers of the world: the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and the British Empire. To achieve this "Wilsonian dream," Roosevelt constantly courted Stalin and was willing to think in terms of a

new bipolar world, in which the Soviet interests and spheres of influence would be guaranteed. This meant no Balkan landing!

Pedro Sebess claims (on p. 21) that those historians who did not see the serious conflict between FDR and Churchill considered the creation of a Balkan front simply as a way to mislead the German military by making them disperse some of their forces in the Balkans and thereby make the Normandy landing easier for The Allies. This thesis is contradicted by the consistent return of Churchill to this question even as early as the Casablanca (January 1943) and as late as the Yalta (February, 1945) conferences. It is also contradicted by Churchill's last-ditch effort to stop the Stalinist plans by sending the British navy to safe-guard the Dardanelles and by landing troops in Greece to fight the communist guerillas. (The latter mission was carried out despite Roosevelt's explicit displeasure of it).

On the part of the Hungarian efforts to find a way out of the war, the opening of the Balkan Front was critical. According to Sebess this was also evident in the efforts of the Hungarian government to establish potential exile governments by financing Tibor Eckhardt's mission in Washington DC and by the funds transferred to Switzerland for a potential second such effort in London. But because Churchill and Roosevelt had very different views on this question, and the latter did not want to alienate Stalin, the plan for a Balkan landing was still-born. However, until the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, Hungarian leaders could not believe that the West was not interested in reaching Central Europe before the Red Army. To the very end, or at least to the time of the botched plan, on October 15, 1944, to switch sides, they still hoped they would not be occupied by solely Soviet power. Sebess points to the numerous contact efforts in Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, where the Budapest government presented its desire for an opportunity to separately withdraw from the conflict. He also stresses the instances when Hungary tried to keep its independence from Germany by refusing to grant the use of the country's railways to transport German troops to attack Poland from the rear. In fact, they even went one step further, by providing asylum for ca. 100,000 Polish troops escaping German captivity and crossing the Hungarian border.

All attempts to keep out of the Nazi-German alliance came to an end with the German attack on Yugoslavia through Hungary and the suicide of Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki. Finally, after the bombing of Kassa (today Kosice, Slovakia), the Bárdossy government joined Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union. Even after this, there was a constant effort to limit Hungarian participation in the war, particularly by the Kállay administration. Even after the Nazi occupation of the country, to forestall an Italy style defection from the Axis, such efforts continued. The most dramatic example of this was the action of Ferenc Koszorús's armored division (acting on the orders of Miklós Horthy), in July 1944, to stop the deportation of Jews from Budapest. This action saved the ca. 200,000 Jewish inhabitants of the capital, but it came too late to save the rest of the Jewish population from Adolf Eichmann's implementation of the Final Solution. Still it was the only instance during World War II that an ally of the Third Reich used its troops to frustrate Hitler's policies to destroy the Jews of Europe.

I hope this interesting treatment of Hungary's fate during World War II is also translated into English. However, when that translation takes place, I also hope that a very thorough proofreading of the C.A. Macartney quotations is undertaken. This excellent source is inadvertently misquoted a number of times in the present rendering. The author refers to two of Macartney's studies: *Hungary and her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences*

(1937) and *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary* (1957). In the discussion of events during the war the latter two-volume study is the one that should be quoted, yet the title of the former volume is the one mentioned in the footnotes, but with the page numbers of the latter study (see, for example, footnote 396 on p. 214, footnote 401 on p. 217, and footnote 411 on p. 224.)

The account provided by Pedro Sebess in his study is lively and interesting to the very end. Overall, I only missed a good name-index and two or three maps that could have been included to elucidate the major time-shifts in the relation of the decisions of the wartime leaders about opening a second front in the Balkans (possibly, such maps would also include the times of the Casablanca, Teheran, and Yalta meetings). I highly recommend this book to all individuals interested in the future of Europe, both from a scholarly and a popular perspective.