British Ambassador to Moscow, A. Kerr, to Prime Minister, W. Churchill. 1 July 1943.

IMMEDIATE.

DEYOU.

Your telegram No. 786.

Following for Prime Minister from Ambassador.

Personal and Most Secret.

[1.] I am certainly keeping my ears and eyes cocked and I can say there have been so far no detectable reactions to the last two messages exchanged[[1]](#footnote-1). […]

3. I hope you will forgive me if I go back to the beginning of the story – the joint message[[2]](#footnote-2). The reasons for taking decisions it conveyed were certainly compelling, but as seen from Moscow there is a weakness in our case. It is inevitable that to someone who shares the lives of the Russians and watches them in their struggle this weakness should present itself in a more formidable way than to those who view it from London.

4. I am the last to wish to plead Stalin’s case. Indeed I am all for giving him a good trouncing from time to time. He needs it, and no one can do it better than you. But I am bound to say that I have been saddened by the present correspondence because here in Moscow this weakness looms large. Twice Stalin has been outspoken of our intention to make a landing in Western Europe this year, and twice we have been obliged to disappoint him. Our weakness lies not in our inability to open this second front but in our having let him believe we were going to.

5. He has picked upon this weakness and has expressed himself in very forthright terms. I do not think he meant to be offensive. My slight experience of him tempts me to the view that he would conceive that he had marshalled his complaints with moderation.

6. When you were here there was some straight talking between you and him and much that he said irritated you. His last message, as I see it, is no more than a reversion to that straight talking on the basis of the relationship you and he established the night before you left Moscow. I know you not to be a submissive man but I think it would be a mistake to take amiss such stuff as this when it comes from a man as rough and as green and as bad mannered as Stalin.

7. My memory of the talks we had in London persuades me that you will have felt the same disappointment about the present inevitable postponement as he. But it should be remembered that his must be a hundredfold keener because he believes the second front we had in mind is vital to him and because he thought it was within his reach.

8. It is melancholy to reflect that we must willy nilly co-operate with this man not only in the beating of Hitler but in the years that will follow, and that upon this co-operation depends millions of lives and to a large extent the future of the world. It seems to me essential therefore that we should hold his confidence even at considered [sic] cost to ourselves. What to me is distressing about the present storm is that he suggests we have lost it just when we seemed to have won it and when he was beginning to draw on it. God knows what tricks he will be up to if you let him get out of your hands.

9. I can therefore only urge you to expand your much tried patience with the old bear and to deal with him as with the bear he is. Honey and bites of meat and the stick when he deserves it. [grp. undec.] he will learn and he will respect the stick when he is in the wrong. I fear however that now he does not see himself wholly in the wrong.

10. I by no means share your view that this need be the end of the Churchill-Stalin correspondence. For myself I put high value on it and vastly prefer it (be it pleasant or unpleasant) to the cold official channel. Please remember that you made a deep impression upon him. But the fact that you were yourself able to judge of his mettle seems to me to have made the risks you took well worth while. I still believe they will bear precious fruits.

[…]

O[ne] T[ime] P[ad]

[TNA, PREM 3/333/5].

Keywords: Inter-allied relations

1. Churchill's message to Stalin on 26 June 1943 (received in Moscow on 27 June). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Roosevelt's letter to Stalin on 2 June (received in Moscow on 4 June) informing of the decision of the Washington Conference to postpone the opening of the second front. A short preceding message (also dated 2 June), clarified that the decision was approved by both Churchill and Roosevelt (Pechatnov V.O., Magadeyev I.E. Perepiska. T. 1. p. 468). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)