Extract from the telegram of the Soviet Ambassador to the United Kingdom, F.T. Gusev, to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, 18 May 1945

CIPHER TELEGRAM MOST SECRET

Copying prohibited

HIGH PRIORITY

During the reception at the Embassy Mrs. Churchill invited me and my wife to a breakfast at her residence on the 18th of May.

The breakfast was attended by Churchill himself, Mrs. Churchill, Kerr, and my wife and myself[[1]](#footnote-1).

[...] Mrs. Churchill asked me to convey her deep gratitude to the Soviet Government and all the Soviet representatives who had done so much for her during her stay in the USSR[[2]](#footnote-2). [...]

Churchill said that he was corresponding with President Truman regarding the next meeting of the heads of the three governments, somewhere on the German territory[[3]](#footnote-3) [...] …he is not sure whether Marshal Stalin would like to meet. Churchill thinks that now that victory had been attained, the allies had faced so many big issues that it became impossible to relieve the high tension without a personal meeting of the heads of the three governments, through telegram exchange only. Churchill again underlined that he considered the situation very tense, and that he thought the tripartite meeting to be of great importance. It is either we will be able to agree on further co-operation between the three countries, - said Churchill, - or the united Anglo-American world will be opposing the Soviet world, and it is impossible now to foresee the results that may arise, should the situation develop through the second scenario.[[4]](#footnote-4) Here Churchill raised his voice and continued, We are full of complaints.

I asked Churchill which complaints he meant. Churchill started enumerating in a loud voice and with irritation the following issues:

1/ Trieste. Tito sneakily crept up on Trieste and wants to take it[[5]](#footnote-5). Churchill showed with his hands on the table how Tito is creeping up to Trieste. We will not allow, snarled Churchill, the territorial issues to be resolved by conquest, and not by way of a peace conference. We and the Americans are united in our resolution, and we believe that all territorial issues should be solved by way of a peaceful conference. I noted that as far as I knew, Tito was not intending to resolve the territorial issues at the present time. Churchill, without paying attention to my words, continued: Tito does not want to take his troops away from Trieste. The situation in this region is very tense. Armies are facing each other. There could be big problems arising any time now, unless prudence prevails. Trieste belongs to our occupation zone, and, being a port, it must become an international one although flying the Italian flag. […]

Churchill has once again mentioned the seriousness of the situation in Trieste region, adding that he, on his part, had taken the necessary steps to increase concentration of the air force[[6]](#footnote-6).

2/ Prague. You do not allow our representatives into Prague, said Churchill. Our Ambassador[[7]](#footnote-7), accredited with Beneš’ government, was not allowed to enter Czechoslovakia, our planes are not allowed to come to Prague.

[...] You want to set up exceptional rights for yourselves in all the capitals where your troops are located. The British Government cannot understand and cannot explain to the British people this position of the Soviet Government, especially in view of the fact that we undertook to be friends and to co-operate with each other. I am prepared to allow any number of your representatives to visit any places in Italy, Germany, Denmark, here in England, where you please. And why can’t you show similar attitude towards the British nation? We, the British, are a respectable nation, and we will not let ourselves be mistreated.

Without listening to any objections, Churchill proceeded to the next issue.

3/ Vienna. You do not allow us into Vienna[[8]](#footnote-8). Our representatives now, after the end of the war, cannot have a look for themselves at what they are being offered in terms of quartering their soldiers in Vienna.

I stopped Churchill and told him as follows: As early as last year the European Advisory Commission had developed the agreement on the occupation zones in Germany and control of the “Gross-Berlin”[[9]](#footnote-9). The governments approved this agreement. At the same time the European Advisory Commission started the discussions of Austria-related issues, and the negotiations have been underway for 10 months already. The Commission has been very close to reaching an agreement on the occupation zones in Austria and in the city of Vienna. However, the British and the American delegations have initiated the suspension of the negotiations. The Soviet delegation is ready to resume the discussion, but it was not through its fault that the negotiations had been suspended.

Why do you not allow our representatives to visit Vienna, asked Churchill. We addressed the Soviet Government with a request to allow our representatives to visit Vienna, and it has once again referred us to the European Advisory Commission. [...]

You have set up the Austrian Government[[10]](#footnote-10), said Churchill. [...] Maybe it is not bad, but it has been set up separately from the Allies.

4/ Berlin. You do not let us into Berlin. You want to make Berlin your exclusive zone.

I said that Churchill’s statements were unfounded, as we had an agreement on the occupation zones and control of “Gross-Berlin”. It is only natural that given the agreement on the occupation zones there could be no equal participation of the representatives of the four countries in the “Gross-Berlin” region. We do not have pretensions to send someone to the regions that are earmarked for occupation by the Soviet troops while the Allies’ troops are still there. Churchill repeated once again that he was prepared to allow any number of Soviet representatives to visit any place.

Churchill proceeded to discuss Poland and spoke with an even greater irritation.

5/ Poland. Churchill said that the Polish affairs were deteriorating, and he does not now see a path to a satisfactory solution. We had named Polish candidates for negotiations, and you have put them into prison. The Parliament and the public are greatly alarmed[[11]](#footnote-11).[...]

He intends to pacify the Parliament public opinion by the promise of the coming meeting of the three, provided Marshal Stalin’s agreement is received by then. While discussing the issue a year ago, he agreed to Curzon Line, believing that it would become a great step towards reaching the agreement on the Polish issue; however, it did not work out like this. Churchill further unobtrusively mentioned that the Baltic issues could also be solved while solving satisfactorily the Polish issue.

Without listening to my comments, Churchill returned to discussing the seriousness of the situation.

Your front extends from Lübeck to Trieste, you hold all the capitals in your hands and do not let anyone there, the situation in Trieste is dangerous, the Polish issues are in a deadlock, the entire atmosphere is tense, - all of this cannot but make us anxious.

I told Churchill that he knew very well the position of the Soviet Government, who does not have any territorial claims and does not put any claims for the European capitals. Our front does not extend to Trieste. It is Marshal Tito’s troops that are there. We are not responsible for Tito’s actions. He and the Yugoslav people have deserved, through their struggle, an honorary place within the United Nations.

I know, - said Churchill, - you are a great nation and have won, through your struggle, an equal place among the great countries, but we, the British, are a respectable nation and we shall not let us be treated rudely or have our interests infringed on. I want you to understand, - said Churchill, - that we are very much concerned about the current situation, and I have ordered to delay the demobilisation of the Air Forces. […]

18/V.45 Gusev

[FPARF, f. 059a, inv. 7, fold. 13, file 6, pp. 349–356]

[Published (in edited form) in: Sovetskoye-angliyskiye otnosheniya vo vremya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941 – 1945. T. 2. M., 1983. p. 385–389]

Keywords: inter-allied relations, Trieste, Yugoslavia, Italy, Poland, post-war Eastern Europe, post-war Western Europe

1. Guseva, Era Kalmanovna. Scholars have deemed the relationship between the wives of Gusev and Churchill to have been very cordial, and to have also somewhat improved contact between the Ambassador and the Prime Minister (Rudnitskii А.Iu. Diplomaticheskaia podgotovka Ialtiinskoi konferentsii. Deiatelꞌnostꞌ Fedora Guseva, posla SSSR v Velikobritanii // Ialta 1945: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii / Sost. Е.А. Bondareva. М., 2015. S. 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Clementine Churchill’s visit to the USSR in her capacity as Chair of the British committee of the Aid to Russia Fund took place between 2 April and 11 May. She met with Stalin (7 April) and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. The visit was actively publicised in the Soviet press and was described in highly positive terms by Kerr (From Moscow to FO, 08/04/1945 // CHAR 20/214) and by Clementine herself in a message to Stalin on 11 May (‘I am leaving your great country after a wonderful & unforgettable visit’) (Cited by: Soames M. Clementine Churchill: the Biography of a Marriage. N.Y., 2003. P. 414). It is revealing that, in his correspondence with his wife, even Churchill expressed thoughts at this time that were uncharacteristic of his general mood in May 1945. On 2 May Churchill wrote to his wife: ‘You should express to Stalin personally my cordial feelings and my resolve and confidence that a complete understanding between the English-speaking world and Russia will be achieved and maintained for many years, as this is the only hope of the world’ (Cited by: Gilbert M. Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941 – 1945. London, 1986. P. 1320). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is possible, in mentioning German territory, Churchill was somewhat ahead of the development in his correspondence with Truman. On 21 May, the Prime Minister asked for Truman’s ideas in relation to a possible time and place for the Big Three to meet, to which the president replied: ‘I hope he [Stalin] will agree to come west into Germany or further west, but I am advised that he is not likely to go beyond Soviet controlled territory’ (Defending the West. P. 86–87). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Quotes have not been used in the original material. Original text of the documents is always respected. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The problem of Trieste, on whose territory the Yugoslav and British armies stood facing each other, gave rise to the most alarmist mood in Churchill at this time. His correspondence with Truman in mid - May hints more than once at the possible outbreak of armed hostilities in the region of Trieste, and even at a new war. See, for example: Defending the West. P. 80–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On 17 May Churchill actually instructed the Chiefs of Staff that ‘all reduction of Bomber Command is to be stopped’. Having separately copied the Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal C. Portal, he insisted, ‘no weakening of the Air Force in Italy or demobilization must take place at present’. Cited in: Churchill W.S. The Second World War. Vol. VI. P. 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nichols, Philip Bouverie Bowyer (1894 – 1962) – British diplomat, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1942 – 1947, initially to the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile), Ambassador to the Netherlands (1948 – 1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Soviet proposal, made by Stalin in a conversation with Harriman on 13 April 1945, to dispatch Allied representatives to Vienna, was later subsumed in the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs’ new provision – a preliminary resolution of the issue of the borders of the occupation zones within the framework of the EAC. The absence of Soviet agreement on the dispatch of Anglo-American representatives to Vienna caused Churchill grave concern. ‘I am much concerned about the way things are going in Austria… the Russians are deliberately exploiting their arrival first into Austria to “organize” the country before we get there’, wrote the Prime Minister to Truman on 30 April (Defending the West. P. 49). Agreement to a fact-finding mission to Vienna by American representatives was given in a message from Stalin to Truman on 18 May. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The London Protocol of 12 September 1944, signed by members of the EAC. This was later modified by the agreements of 14 November 1944 (changing the borders of the occupation zones) and 26 July 1945 (inclusion of France in the occupation and the delineation of her corresponding zone). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The government headed by the Social-Democrat K. Renner which was formed on 27 April. Two days later, disregarding requests by Western partners to avoid haste in this regard, it was recognized by Moscow. Three government posts (Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Education Minister) were held by Communists, who had already discussed the issues facing a future Austria at length with Dimitrov on 4 April – the day before the storming of Vienna began (The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov. P. 366). On the whole, ‘the formation of the Provisional Government [in Austria] raised western fears of a Soviet coup de main and caused a crisis between Churchill and Stalin’ (Mueller W. Stalin and Austria: New Evidence on Soviet Policy in a Secondary Theatre of the Cold War, 1935 – 53/55 // Cold War History. 2006. Vol. 6. No. 1. P. 67). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Reference to the 16 representatives of the Polish Home Army (headed by General L. Okulicki), who, under the pretext of talks, were brought by the Soviets to Moscow at the end of March. There they were arrested and placed on trial in June. Thirteen were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, three were pronounced innocent. See: NKVD i polꞌskoe podꞌpole 1944 – 1945 (Po “Osobym papkam” Stalina). М., 1994. S. 18–22. The Soviet version of events surrounding the Okulicki group was laid out in a message from Stalin to Churchill on 4 May (copied to Truman). The “Polish Question” was debated in the Houses of Parliament on 29–31 May, however, the British Government preferred not to focus on it. This was particularly so with Members’ questions about the fate of the Okulicki group in Soviet custody; Eden answered evasively, alluding to the lack of detailed information (Hansard. Parliamentary Debates. 5th Series. 5th Series. Vol. 411. Col. 190). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)