From the diary of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, V.M. Molotov, dated 18 December 1945

SECRET

RECEPTION OF E. BEVIN, FOREIGN SECRETARY OF GREAT BRITAIN

# 18th December, 1945

at 14:00

Attended by: A.J. Vyshinsky, V.N. Pavlov (PCFA[[1]](#footnote-1)), Kerr, the British Ambassador in the USSR, interpreter McAfee.

Bevin declares that he would like to discuss with Molotov a number of issues. First, he would like to learn, why Molotov has raised the issue of Greece. In London it appeared to Bevin that Molotov left the Greek affairs at the discretion of Britain.

Molotov says that events in Greece are developing in a feverish manner. Greece can’t get out of a government crisis[[2]](#footnote-2). There is no such situation in the other countries. […]

Molotov […] In Greece, democratic people who fought against Germans are being repressed. […]

Bevin declares that this information is not precise. If repression is really taking place in Greece, the British army is not taking part in them and Britain doesn’t encourage them.

Molotov says that, anyway, Greeks are not the landlords of Greece.

Bevin asks who the landlords of Greece are.

Molotov answers that the British are the landlords.

Bevin remarks that in the same manner Russians are the landlords of Bulgaria.

Molotov says that elections were held in Bulgaria. The Soviet Government recognises that the influence of the Soviet Union in Bulgaria is not weak. Russia twice helped Bulgarians rid themselves of foreign domination. Russia also helped Greeks get rid of aggressors. But it is necessary to consider that Greece is an allied country. Bulgaria was not an allied country, and the Soviet armies are in Bulgaria according to the agreement on an armistice with it, signed by Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Bevin remarks that the British government has also entered into the agreement with the Greek government on stationing of the British armies in Greece.

Molotov says that in Greece the governments change almost every day. So with which Greek government did the British government enter into the agreement mentioned by Bevin? As far as Molotov is aware, this agreement has not been published in the press. On the other hand, the Treaty of Varkiza concluded between the democratic parties of Greece under the direction of the British government and without participation of the Soviet Government, is not carried out.

[…]

Bevin answers that if the British government is mentioned, one can speak just about the only modification of the Treaty of Varkiza, i.e. that in Greece the government elections should first take place, and the issue of the king’s restoration should be solved afterwards. Bevin has flatly refused to give instructions on who should enter the Greek government.

Molotov says that in any case, the decision taken in Varkiza on different groups participating in the government is not being implemented.

Bevin says that he does not participate in the government forming.

[…]

Molotov says that the main point is what government will hold elections. Many Greeks do not trust the present government.

Bevin remarks that this is the same for all the Balkan countries and governments that are under the Russia’s influence.

Molotov replies that the Balkan countries that Bevin is referring to were at war against the Allies, while Greece was an ally.

Bevin says that there would be a lot of criticism regarding the affairs in some countries influenced by Britain. But as for Greece, the British government has sent elections experts there who, having checked electoral registers, discovered that they have been properly compiled. […]

Bevin says that it would be very good to improve the situation in the Balkans.

Molotov asks about Bevin’s suggestions.

Bevin says that it is necessary to demobilise the Bulgarian army, which is a cause of all sorts of concerns. Bevin desires a situation with no concerns. None of us, says Bevin, seem to wish that disputes between the small countries cause misunderstanding between us[[3]](#footnote-3).

Molotov says that it is correct, and asks what else Bevin means.

Bevin says that he would like to suggest the withdrawal of all armies from the Balkan countries.

Molotov asks what else Bevin suggests.

Bevin answers that he suggests reducing the number of occupational armies in Austria. This issue has already been put by the British government to the Soviet and American governments. Bevin believes that there are too many armies in a small country such as Austria and it is necessary to consider their reduction, especially now that Austria has elected the government[[4]](#footnote-4). […]

Molotov asks what else Bevin means.

Bevin says that he means Hungary where there are also many armies, and Poland where armies are present as well. The situation in many countries would be easier if armies were withdrawn. Besides, it would improve mutual trust between the Allies. Bevin also wants to mention Iran. An agreement was achieved on the withdrawal of armies from Iran. Britain has 6 thousand people left in Iran located in the south, and according to the British government’s data the Soviet Union still has 30 thousand people in northern Iran. Bevin would like to exchange opinions with Molotov on the situation in Iran. The fact of the matter is, there are places in the world which both the Soviet Union and Great Britain are interested in, and in such places, as Greece, Turkey and Persia, for example, Bevin wants there to be no difficulties between Great Britain and the Soviet Union caused by misunderstanding of each other’s motives. Bevin does not want conflicts between Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

[…]

Bevin says that Iran is a place that requires especially careful activities, since the House of Commons is very sensitive to events in Iran, as events there contribute to growing suspicions, perhaps unreasonable ones. Bevin was very careful in his answers to questions concerning Iran[[5]](#footnote-5).

Bevin says that Molotov then raised the issue of Indonesia at the Conference. The British position concerning Indonesia is very simple to explain. Holland declared war on Japan. Indonesia was attacked by Japan and was occupied by the Japanese army. Indonesia belonged to the Netherlands. When a decision was taken to transfer the military activities in Indonesia to the command of southeast Asia headed by admiral Mountbatten[[6]](#footnote-6), two tasks were assigned to the British government: 1) to accept Japan’s capitulation and 2) to restore civil authorities in Indonesia. […] In Indonesia the British government has curbed its efforts in liberating interned and captured Japanese. […] The British government strives to settle the situation in Indonesia, and, anyway, Britain is not going to stay there. Bevin is saying this so that it is clear that the British government is not going to expand the territory of the British Empire. When the British government carries out the tasks under the conditions of armistice with Japan, the British army will leave Indonesia. It may be useful if the three Secretaries advise the conflicting parties in order to avoid unrest in Indonesia. Bevin would not object to it.

Bevin says that in India the British government is carrying out a big task, as well. Elections should take place there in March[[7]](#footnote-7). Despite religious and other difficulties, the British government intends to form an assembly in India to decide on constitutional issues. […]

Bevin remarks that he has been perfectly candid in telling Molotov as to what concerns the British government. Bevin believes that an open exchange of opinions is very useful.

Molotov replies that during the war Britain and the Soviet Union have together put into practice many important decisions and have achieved results thanks to friendly cooperation with each other, and to the fact that they informed each other on important issues of international politics. Throughout the war, while Great Britain and the Soviet Union were pursuin allied relations, the Soviet Union was not less open to joint discussions on issues than the British government.

Molotov would now like to discuss issues mentioned by Bevin. First, about the Balkan countries. In the Balkans, there are both allied and defeated countries. For example, Greece is an allied state. Naturally there arises the issue on the presence of foreign armies in Greece. When it was required for military operations, it did not cause questions; but when the war ended, there is no more need for foreign armies in Greece, as the situation has changed. Bevin can say that Poland is also an allied state, but the Soviet army is stationed there. The difference between Greece and Poland is obvious. This issue was mentioned at the Berlin Conference and after the Berlin Conference the Soviet government has fulfilled its promise to reduce its army in Poland. The occupation of Germany, where the Soviet army is stationed and whence it may leave, requires communications between the Soviet Union and Germany, and these communications are via Poland. The presence of certain Soviet armies in Poland is caused by the needs of occupation of Germany. The Soviet armies are mainly stationed on the former German territories that were transferred to Poland. This cannot be said of Greece. The occupation of a defeated country does not require the presence of foreign armies in Greece.

Molotov says that Bevin probably knows that in November the Soviet army withdrew from Czechoslovakia, since the Soviet army can do without communications via Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Government withdrew its army from Czechoslovakia on its own initiative as it already assumed shortly after the war that Allied military presence in allied Czechoslovakia was no longer necessary[[8]](#footnote-8).

A defeated state cannot be in the same position as an allied one. Bevin mentioned Bulgaria and Hungary, where the presence of Soviet occupation troops was stipulated under the conditions of the armistice. Moreover, when at the Council of Ministers session in London the draft of the peace treaty with Bulgaria and Romania was discussed, the Americans suggested that even after the conclusion of the peace treaty the Soviet Union should keep its army in Romania for support of communications via Romania to Austria. Everyone agreed to this.

Molotov says that the Soviet military authorities study the British suggestions concerning Austria.

Regarding Iran, Molotov declares that the issue of withdrawal of troops from Iran was already discussed twice - in Berlin and in London. In both cases an agreement took place to adhere to the British-Soviet-Iranian agreement[[9]](#footnote-9). The Soviet Government is sticking to this agreement and does not see a reason for discussion of this issue. As for the events in Northern Iran, they are absolutely natural in the post-war conditions. The Soviet army did not help the democratic movement among the local population and did not even participate in it. Here the issue is about the national aspirations of the local Azerbaijani population. This is the internal affair of Iran. Certainly, if this movement was hostile to the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government could not remain a quiet observer. After all, Baku is near to this region. But since it remains the business of national democrats directed neither against the Iranian government nor against the Soviet Government, although events take place on the border the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government did not and will not interfere in these events, considering them an internal affair of Iran.

In general, Molotov would like to direct attention to the situation in different countries where the Soviet army is present, but does not stand in the way of different circumstances in these countries. In northern Iran there is one situation; in the part of Austria occupied by the Soviet army there is another situation, which is absolutely different from the situation in the neighboring countries where the Soviet army is also stationed. This was illustrated by the elections in Northern Iran and in the zone of Austria occupied by the Soviet army. The Soviet occupational armies in Bulgaria and Hungary also did not interfere with the internal events in these countries; election results in Bulgaria and Hungary were different. The local population held an election as it willed. The same may be said about Finland. Several months ago, an election was held there. The Soviet authorities did not interfere in Finland’s internal affairs, though Finland is a defeated and neighbouring country. They did not do it since Finland does not have a hostile policy towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet Government let Bulgarians, Hungarians, Finns, Austrians and Iranians solve their affairs the way they consider it necessary.

Concerning Indonesia Molotov says that the Soviet delegation is forced to bring this issue since events there remind a new war, whereas war is already finished.

[…] Throughout the whole war the Soviet Government was extremely careful concerning India, understanding that this country is of great importance for the British Empire, especially in wartime[[10]](#footnote-10).

Molotov says that, of course, there are issues concerning Germany as well as the Far East - Japan and China, which should be discussed at the meeting.

Bevin replies that he told Molotov about India so that Molotov does not have a wrong understanding of events in this country. Bevin will continue to keep Molotov informed about events in India, as India occupies an important place among the Far East issues. The British government strongly wants to solve the Indian issue if it appears possible.

Bevin declares that he considers the exchange of opinions and information with Molotov to be very useful. He agrees that an open exchange of opinions is necessary. It is necessary to understand that the British Empire is sensitive with regard to some places in the East, and between the Soviet Union and Great Britain there should be no misunderstanding regarding places of common interest, in order to avoid conflicts between them.

Molotov says that, unfortunately, concerning the states neighbouring the Soviet Union, the British government, at least in some cases, does not consider the interests of the Soviet Union.

Bevin asks what countries Molotov is referring to.

Molotov says that, for example, Romania which has attacked us, is still under occupation and has not yet signed the peace treaty; Soviet Union cannot accept a hostile government which is also not supported by the Romanian people. However, when Romania formed a government that enjoyed the support of the Romanian people it was met with a negative attitude from Britain. This is one of the examples.

Bevin says that he declared several times and repeats again that the British government does not intend to encourage governments hostile to the Soviet Union. The point of dispute is whether this or that government was elected correctly and honestly.

Bevin expresses hope that Molotov will consider what he was told, and Bevin, in his turn, promises to consider what he was told by Molotov.

[…]

Recorded by V. Pavlov.

[FPARF, f. 0430, inv. 2, fold. 4, file 4, pp. 16–26]

Keywords: Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, inter-allied relations, post-war Asia, post-war Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Iran, India

1. People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From January to November 1945 Greece managed to go through five heads of government: N. Plastiras (January – April), P. Voulgaris (April – October), Archbishop Damaskinos (October – November), P. Kanellopoulos (November), T. Sophoulis (November 1945 – April 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1945, the British leadership were seriously concerned about the threat of raids on Greek territory by Yugoslav and Bulgarian units. It was decided at a meeting of the Defence Committee (31 August 1945) that such raids could be prevented by British threats of aerial bombardment; the Air Staff tried to translate this into a practical course of action, requesting the reinforcement of the British contingent in Greece (C.O.S. (45) 569 (O), Note by Portal, 07/09/1945 // TNA, CAB 80/97). Most of all the British authorities were worried by a scenario whereby possible support from the USSR would encourage aggressive action by Yugoslavia and Bulgaria: directives to Field Marshal Alexander, prepared back in July 1945, suggested that ‘it is in general unlikely that Bulgaria, Yugoslavia or Albania would deliberately countenance any considerable assault on Greece unless they were assured of Russian backing’ (C.O.S. (45) 493 (O), Memo by War Office, 24/07/1945 // TNA, CAB 80/96). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The conservative Austrian People’s Party was victorious in parliamentary elections that took place on 25 November 1945 and their leader L. Figl headed the Government. The Communist Party of Austria polled only 5.42% of the vote. For more detail see: Mueller W. Soviet Policy, Political Parties, and the Preparation for Communist Takeovers in Hungary, Germany, and Austria, 1944 – 1946 // East European Politics and Societies. 2010. Vol. 24. No. 1. P. 90–115. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Moscow meeting of Foreign Ministers unfolded against the background of the declaration on 12 December 1945 of the Azerbaijan People’s Government in northern Iran. In the corridors outside the meeting, officials of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs tried to avoid discussion on the “Iranian question”. ‘A memorandum to the People’s Commissar dated 13 December suggested removal of the proposal to examine the Iranian issue, tabled by Byrnes on 7 December, and which had triggered the Moscow meeting, should a counter proposal by the USSR for the withdrawal of British troops from Greece and American troops from China not be accepted. A likely proposal by Bevin and Byrnes for the dispatch of a special Allied commission to Iran was to be refused under the pretext of interference in the internal affairs of another state. (Gasanly Dzh. SSSR – Iran. S. 176). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mountbatten, Louis (1900 – 1979) – British Admiral of the Fleet and statesman, Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command (1943 – 1946), Viceroy of India (1947), Governor-General of the independent Dominion of India (1947 – 1948), Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet (1952 – 1954), First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (1955 – 1959). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The coming elections in India, which promised to lead to intensification of struggle by the Indian National Congress for independence, created serious anxieties within British authorities. The Minister for Indian Affairs F. Pethick-Lawrence wrote in mid-November 1945 that the Viceroy Lord Mountbatten 'warns His Majesty’s Government to be prepared for a serious attempt by Congress next spring, and even possibly sooner, to subvert the present administration by force’. (C.P. (45) 281, Memo by Pethick-Lawrence, 14/11/1945 // TNA, CAB 129/4). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia was completed by 6 November 1945. British military underestimated the flexibility of the Soviet position in respect of Czechoslovakia at this time, predicting in September 1945 an increase in the Red Army contingent to 400 thousand men by winter 1945/46. See: From 30 Military Mission, 21/09/1945 (in: C.O.S. (45) 615 (O)) // TNA, CAB 80/97. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It was signed in Tehran on 29 January 1942. It envisaged, among other things, the withdrawal of British and Soviet troops from Iran no later than 6 months after the cessation of all Allied military actions against Germany and her satellites. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It is characteristic that in Tehran at the time of the face-to-face discussions on 28 November 1943 Stalin and Roosevelt concurred that India was “a sore spot” for Churchill, but subsequently neither of them raised this issue in talks with Churchill himself. See: Tegeranskaia konferentsiia. S. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)