Minutes of conversations between the Chairman Council of People's Commissars, I.V. Stalin, and the British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, dated 24 December 1945[[1]](#footnote-1)

SECRET.

RECORD OF COMRADE STALIN’S CONVERSATION WITH E. BEVIN, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GREAT BRITAIN

# 24 December 1945

at 19:00.

Attendants: V.M. Molotov, V.N. Pavlov (PCFA), A.K. Kerr, Ambassador of Great Britain; A. Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary and McAfee, the interpreter.

Bevin declared that before his departure he would like to discuss two or three issues. Among the issues are the events in Iran. Bevin says that he has informed the British government of the suggestions he had discussed with Generalissimo Stalin in their last conversation. The British government, recognising the Soviet Union’s right to support the oil region of Baku is the same as the right of any other country supporting similar regions, believes that the situation developed in such a way that the maintenance of a big army is hardly a necessary measure for this purpose. The British armies are reduced to four thousand personnel, and they are a long way from Tehran. The British government is aiming to speed up the process of withdrawal from Iran. However, even after the withdrawal of armies the situation remains unresolved. Therefore, Bevin has proposed to form a tripartite commission, having set out its scope and objectives. The British government and Bevin believe that, after the Allies have used the territory of Iran during the war, it would not be entirely convenient if the whole issue is handed to the United Nations Organization for consideration. Bevin would not like for Iran to be the source of damage to the friendship between the Soviet Union and the Great Britain. Bevin does not know whether Generalissimo Stalin has read the suggestions which Bevin had handed over to Molotov today[[2]](#footnote-2). Bevin believes that these suggestions allow for an opportunity to resolve the issue, to provide integrity to the territory of Iran and to eliminate the source of difficulties. Bevin does not know whether Generalissimo Stalin will support such a statement on the issue.

Comrade Stalin answered that he thinks this document may truly form a basis for some kind of agreement. It will be necessary to make some amendments, but insignificant ones.

Comrade Stalin asks how can this be done practically.

Bevin replied that Molotov could pass on the amendments to him tomorrow morning or tonight, and Bevin would be ready to consider them.

Comrade Stalin said that afterwards it will be necessary to organise a commission. Comrade Stalin thinks that the Russians will find a common language with the English. Byrnes’ attitude to these suggestions is unknown.

Bevin answered that he showed Byrnes the suggestions, but he has not yet expressed a particular opinion.

Comrade Stalin said that the Soviet amendments will be presented today or tomorrow morning.

Bevin said that he will use the dinner at Generalissimo Stalin’s as an opportunity to talk it over with Byrnes.

Bevin declared that there are some Balkan issues which are not related to the issues which have been considered at the Meeting of the Secretaries, such as the issue of the Danube Сommission[[3]](#footnote-3). Great Britain conducted the war and believes that it should not lose anything as a result of its victory. The British government believes that the Danube Сommission should be restored with modifications that are the result of the war.

Comrade Stalin answered that he is not very familiar with this issue and has not yet seen Bevin’s document.

Bevin said that, in that case, perhaps Kerr will discuss this issue with Molotov.

Comrade Stalin answered that since this issue was put forward, it will certainly be discussed.

Bevin said that negotiations with the Allied Commission in Hungary have taken place regarding the right of British vessels to navigate along the Danube under the British flag. Bevin would like to clarify this issue and wants the British vessels to have the right of navigation along Danube as soon as trade in Europe resumes. Bevin wrote about it in a letter to Molotov[[4]](#footnote-4) and perhaps Molotov will discuss this issue with Kerr.

Comrade Stalin replied that this is possible.

Bevin said that at the Berlin Conference Generalissimo Stalin promised that the Soviet Government would make sure that Bulgaria pays reparations to Greece.

Comrade Stalin replied that at the Berlin Conference it was stated that Bulgaria should pay reparations.

Bevin answered that, so far, the Bulgarians have only given old horses to the Greeks. Bevin would be very grateful if the Soviet Government could use its influence on Bulgarians to finalise these negotiations.

Comrade Stalin replied that it is necessary to oblige the Bulgarians to resume negotiations. Greece has already declared its claims for reparations and has the right to demand them, while Bulgaria is obliged to pay them.

Bevin appreciates this.

Bevin informed that, in response to his telegram, he has received a message from London that the British representatives in the Reparation Commission in Germany were instructed to finish the scheduling of deliveries from the western zones in accordance with deadline set out in the plan.

Bevin said that at the Berlin Conference an agreement was reached regarding the oil equipment in Romania[[5]](#footnote-5). The British side has presented all the facts, but has not yet received the corresponding facts from the Soviet representatives, who by that time had left Romania.

Comrade Molotov replied that it is a misunderstanding. The departure of the Soviet representatives was caused by the fact that they were being replaced by other employees, due to some changes in the People’s Commissariats. The Commission will not stop working.

Bevin said that he would like to discuss the London - Moscow air route.

Molotov answered that the Soviet Government has long ago agreed to organise the air link between Moscow and London, on the condition that part of the way from Moscow to Berlin will be serviced by Soviet airplanes; and from London to Berlin by the British ones. This could form the basis for an agreement.

Bevin asked why not to organise direct flights between Moscow and London, since nowadays there are airplanes able to make non-stop flights between Moscow and London.

Molotov answered that all the agreements concluded by the Soviet Government with foreign countries about the airlines are based on the principle of joint company. Certainly, there may be exceptions when, occasionally, airplanes can make direct flights from London to Moscow.

Bevin said that he would like both Soviet and British airplanes to make direct flights from London to Moscow.

Comrade Stalin said that, in that case, it will be necessary to enter into special agreements with the countries over which the flights will be conducted.

Comrade Stalin said whether this will also include the organisation of a Soviet-British aircraft service via Paris[[6]](#footnote-6).

Bevin answered in the negative, but adds that it would be possible to arrange it, if it is considered desirable.

Comrade Stalin said that the Soviet Government sticks to a principle that only the Soviet airplanes should fly over Soviet territory. This principle was observed when the Soviet Government had entered into agreements with the Swedes, the Americans and others.

Bevin said that he hopes that since the Soviet Union and Britain have now got to know each other well, would it be possible to enter into a Soviet-British agreement on the air route on a different basis.

Comrade Stalin said that it is better not to do so, as in this case the Soviet Government would have to review agreements with a number of other countries.

Comrade Stalin said that he would like the issue of the Skagerrak Straits to be somehow clarified, since the Soviet Government does not currently know whether it is possible to freely navigate these straits. Comrade Stalin would like to know Bevin’s opinion on how to go about doing this in the best possible way.

Comrade Stalin said that Bevin raised the issue of handing over the Dodecanese Islands to Greece. The Soviet Government does not have basic objections against the transfer of some of the Dodecanese Islands to Greece, which were allocated to Greece at the London Conference. But Comrade Stalin would not like this issue to be resolved separately. This issue is part of the general question of the peace treaty with Italy – where during the proceedings in London the Soviet Union was very much offended. The British and the Americans are afraid to hand over Tripolitania under the trusteeship of the Soviet Union. Is it not possible to have greater confidence in the Soviet Union when such a proposal is being considered? The English have many bases in different parts of the world and they lose nothing, and so do the Americans. Could this issue be resolved in the Soviet Union’s favour?

Bevin replied that he is not informed about the Belt Straits. He did not expect for this issue to be raised in Moscow and did not take with him the corresponding documents. Therefore, it is necessary to postpone this issue until Bevin’s return to London[[7]](#footnote-7).

Comrade Stalin answered that he is not rushing Bevin.

Bevin said that now, after the victory over Germany has been attained, the British government considers that, above all, all countries need freedom. Therefore, the British government does not want bases to be established in any region.

Comrade Stalin replied that he was not referring to bases in Skagerrak.

Bevin said that he has only mentioned it to clarify the issue for himself[[8]](#footnote-8).

Bevin said that, now, in in the wake of the conference in Moscow, things are moving forward, and that the deputy-secretaries of the Council of Foreign Ministers can resume their work in London on drawing up the peace treaty with Italy. However, Bevin would like to ask whether it is possible to hand over the Dodecanese Islands to Greece de facto, without waiting for the signing of the peace treaty with Italy.

Bevin said that the issue of Tripolitania is especially sensitive for Great Britain. In London Bevin had proposed to transfer Tripolitania under Italy’s trusteeship. Certainly, it is a difficult issue, but when there is a proposal between an international trusteeship and that of an individual, the British government prefers international trusteeship[[9]](#footnote-9).

Comrade Stalin asked, what is meant by this.

Bevin replied that since the Mediterranean Sea was a source of conflict for a number of centuries, he believes that it would be better to have a trusteeship over Tripolitania by four countries instead of one. As Generalissimo Stalin remembers, during the decision-making on the Tangier issue[[10]](#footnote-10) the British government consulted the Soviet government and the Soviet Government joined the agreement. Bevin thinks that, should an international port be formed in Tripolitania, then an organization of trusteeship over Tripolitania between the four countries would be the best decision on this issue.

Comrade Stalin said that he understood.

Bevin said that during the subsequent negotiations, of course, it will be possible to return to this issue[[11]](#footnote-11), but he thinks that it would be better to organise the trusteeship between the four countries.

Bevin said that, the British government has almost finished all preparations for the withdrawal of its armies from Syria and Lebanon. Bevin understands that now, shortly after the war, everybody is striving to ensure their own security and to obtain bases. However, Bevin believes that it is better to rely not on bases, but on trust[[12]](#footnote-12).

Comrade Stalin said that, in regards to Tripolitania, there is mistrust towards the Soviet Union.

Bevin replied that it is not an issue of mistrust, but of avoiding competition.

Comrade Stalin said that Britain is now free to do what it wants in Indonesia. Comrade Stalin said that, he naively understands that Indonesia and the countries located around India belong to the British sphere. America has China and Japan, while Soviet Union has nothing. Comrade Stalin would not even mention Italy[[13]](#footnote-13).

Bevin replied that, in Indonesia, Britain intends to hand everything over to the Dutch and the native population. The English will withdraw from Indochina this week, having disarmed the Japanese and handed over the country’s government to the local authorities. The British will be happy to do it. If in Indonesia it will be possible to settle affairs between the Dutch and the native population, the British will withdraw right away[[14]](#footnote-14).

Comrade Stalin explained that he does not want Britain to leave its semi-colonial and colonial territories. This would not be in the interest of peace-loving, democratic countries. Comrade Stalin is convinced that, for example, had the British not been present in Egypt, then the Germans would have occupied Egypt and the Egyptians would have handed over everything to Germans[[15]](#footnote-15).

Bevin said that Great Britain intends to protect Egypt from attacks from foreign countries, but wants to keep it open for international trade. The British government hopes to gain support from the Soviet Government once negotiations on this issue begin[[16]](#footnote-16).

Comrade Stalin replied that this is fair.

Conversation lasted for 45 minutes.

Recorded by: [signature] (V. Pavlov)

[RSASPH, f. 558, inv. 11, file 285, pp. 50-62]

Keywords: post-war order, inter-allied relations, post-war Western Europe, Iran, post-war Asia, Iran, the Balkans

1. The British record of the conversation was published in: DBPO. Ser. 1. Vol. 2 / Ed. by R. Bullen, M.E. Pelly. London, 1985. P. 864–868. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The historian J. Hasanli summarised these in the following way: ‘Britain proposed recommending to the Government of Iran that it reorganises the work of local Anjomans and provides for the learning of minority languages – Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic. According to Bevin’s idea, taking into account the divergence of opinion between the central government and the provinces, the Iranian Government would be recommended, in accordance with the Constitution, to allow the opening of provincial Anjomans’ (Gasanly Dzh. SSSR – Iran. S. 184). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The British side had sought the restoration of the Danube Commission on foundations formulated at the Paris convention of 1921 and which had provided for the domination of the commission by Western Powers (Great Britain and, to an extent, France). The USSR insisted on working out a new convention, which would facilitate the predominance of Danubian states in the commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The letter dated 24 December containing the British protest against the actions of the Soviet side which had impeded the transfer of British ships in the Romanian part of the Danube. См.: DBPO. Ser. 1. Vol. 2. P. 865n4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This refers to the resolution for the creation of two expert commissions (a Soviet-British one and a Soviet-American one) for the examination of issues in connection with the seizure of oil production equipment in Romania. They were due to begin work no later than 11 August (Berlinskaia konferentsiia. S. 443). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This comment of Stalin’s is absent from the British record of the conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This comment of Bevin’s is absent from the British record of the conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This exchange of comments is absent from the British record of the conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As evidenced by the discussion of this issue in the British Cabinet in September 1945, Byrnes’s reasons in favour of international (collective) trusteeship were reduced to the desire to stop the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean and to prevent the creation of Soviet bases there, as well as to draw the USA into the matter in support of this design. See: C.M. (45) 32nd Conclusions, Conf. Annex, 15/09/1945 // TNA, CAB 128/1 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Participants in the Berlin conference agreed with the Soviet proposal to protect the international status of the Tangier zone ‘in view of its strategic significance’ and agreed to extend the discussion of the issue in Paris (with the participation of France) (Berlinskaia konferentsiia. S. 444). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In the British record, Bevin’s thinking was recorded more precisely: new talks on the issue would be possible ‘when our friendship had grown and developed further’. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In the British record Bevin’s idea received a more pointed significance in respect of the phrase: ‘He could not imagine any of the Great Powers fighting each other’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In the British record, after Stalin has spoken, Bevin makes the following retort: ‘Mr. BEVIN pointed out that the Russian sphere extended from Lübeck to Port Arthur’. Characteristically, it resonates with Churchill’s words of May 1945. See Churchill’s telegram to Eden of 4 May. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Bevin’s last words, as preserved in the British record, are absent from this retort: ‘British intentions were not so reprehensible as Generalissimo Stalin might think’. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Stalin’s words are less concrete in the British record: ‘For instance, the presence of the British in Egypt during the war had been of considerable value’. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bevin’s concluding phrase is absent; it was captured in the British record (and Stalin actually agreed with it): ‘When we came to deal with that part of the world, seeing that Generalissimo Stalin recognised that the British had a duty to police it, he hoped that His Majesty’s Government could count on the Generalissimo’s sympathetic consideration.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-16)