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TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW WITH THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER CHURCHILL

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At 12 o'clock in the afternoon I visited Churchill to deliver Comrade V.M. Molotov’s response to Churchill’s own despatch that was passed on to Molotov on 2 June by the British ambassador in Moscow, Gascoigne[[1]](#footnote-1).

After reading the content of Comrade V.M. Molotov’s response, Churchill paid particular attention to the following phrase in the dispatch: “Hopefully, you already know our opinion on the Bermuda meeting, and there are no apparent reasons for us to change this opinion.”Churchill enquired as to which opinion of the Soviet government on the Bermuda meeting the dispatch was referring to. Then, without waiting for my response he immediately added that he had carefully read an article in *Pravda* [[2]](#footnote-2) about his speech in the British Parliament on 11 May[[3]](#footnote-3) and remembered well the opinion of the Bermuda meeting outlined there. Churchill then at length and passionately argued that there was no reason to express doubt regarding the upcoming meeting in Bermuda and of his own intentions, since the purpose of the meeting was "build[ing] bridges, not barriers", as he had informed V. M. Molotov in his message of 2 June.

I drew Churchill’s attention to the fact that, according to the American and British press, the goal of the Bermuda meeting was to develop a common line between the Three great powers, implying that the Western powers intended to continue pursuing a policy of collusion with each other at the expense of the Soviet Union, which of course, could not contribute to any relaxation of the international situation, nor the improvement of Soviet-British relations.

Churchill once again stressed that the Bermuda meeting and his upcoming talks with Eisenhower would not be hostile towards the Soviet Union and were not intended as a conspiracy at the expense of the Soviet Union. Thus, he added: “enough with all of that,” as if acknowledging that he did not intend to continue with the ongoing conspiracy between Britain and the USA against the Soviet Union.

Responding to my remark that when the three parties were supposed to meet to decide on an important issue and if two of the three met in advance to discuss their common line, the third party, quite naturally, would doubt the intentions of the other two. Churchill said that the relationship between the USSR and Britain had no third party, and that he held negotiations with the Soviet government about the improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations face-to-face, without participation or advice from any third party.[[4]](#footnote-4) Having again underlined that his intention was to “build bridges, and not to create barriers”, he at length spoke of how at Bermuda he intends to persuade Eisenhower of the need to convene a meeting of the heads of the greats powers with the Soviet Union in order to improve the international situation and that he, Churchill, hopes to succeed. He further said that he was not deceiving himself with the hope that a great deal could be done towards the main goal – the improvement of international relations, since it takes time, caution, and patience. However, he believed that he would be able to improve international relations and create an atmosphere of confidence for at least three to five years, and that later his successors would continue his line. He did not hope for more. Everything would depend on how events would unravel, he added.

Churchill declared that he intended to improve international relations and to avoid war, since no single country – neither the UK, nor Russia, nor the US – would benefit from it, while the world would be torn apart.

Responding to my remark that while the UK, the USSR, and other European countries – some more, some less – had frequently experienced the burdens of war and know what war brings with it, the Americans, having not experienced the burdens of modern warfare, approach the question of war differently, Churchill argued that the Americans had a tough experience during the Civil War and that they are not belligerent.

I replied that the Civil War in the USA was about 100 years ago and that the Americans had sufficiently forgotten the experience of that war.

Churchill then launched into lengthy reminiscences that he was the heir to the English who fought on the side of Washington against the British for the freedom of America. Therefore, Churchill said, he considered himself half-American. He explained that his ancestors from his mother’s side had taken part in the American war of liberation.

Responding to my remark whether one should still consider him more as an Englishman than an American, he laughed and answered in the affirmative.

Afterwards, Churchill recollected his meetings and personal friendly correspondence with I.V. Stalin and said that he would like to establish similar correspondence with G.M. Malenkov and V.M. Molotov. Churchill stressed here that Stalin had a sense of humor and that during the meetings, talks and lunches with him the atmosphere was friendly and had a lot of genuine laughter. Churchill said that while he had met many Soviet leaders over time, he expressed regret he was not acquainted with Comrade G.M. Malenkov and expressed confidence that he would soon meet him. Churchill underlined that he could always find common ground for agreements and conclude agreements with Comrade Stalin and that both sides had fulfilled those agreements.

As an example, he mentioned his talks with Stalin on the influence of the Soviet Union and Britain in Eastern European countries and the Balkans. According to Churchill, in October 1944 during talks with Stalin, he, Churchill, had proposed the following division of spheres of influence between the Soviet Union and Britain that roughly expressed the degree of influence in terms of percentages: in Romania and Bulgaria, 90 percent Soviet influence and 10 percent British; in Greece, 90 percent British influence and 10 percent Soviet and in Yugoslavia, 50 percent, respectively. According to Churchill, Stalin suggested that in Hungary the influence of the Soviet Union and Britain should 50-50. Churchill, in his words, formalised all of this in a document with an indication of percentages and presented the document to Comrade Stalin[[5]](#footnote-5). During subsequent negotiations, he, Churchill, declared that as the agreement was reached, it would be desirable to destroy the document, because it was strictly confidential; if, contrary to all expectations, it was made public, it would look very cynical, as the division of territories with millions of people. I.V. Stalin, according to Churchill, replied that he could return to him the document and he returned it. “This document - said Churchill - I have kept so far as a particularly important secret document.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Churchill then reiterated that it was an historical fact, which he had already mentioned in a conversation with me during the presentation of credentials to the Queen, that he took drastic measures, including those of a military nature against the Greek communists, in order to strengthen Britain’s position and British influence in Greece[[7]](#footnote-7). He was criticised for those measures, even in the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times*, not to mention the American press. The Soviet newspapers at this time, particularly *Pravda* did not attack Churchill and no part of the Soviet government nor the Soviet press manifested hostile intentions against Churchill. All of this, Churchill stressed, gave him reason to believe that it was possible to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union and that the Soviet Union strictly complied with the reached agreement.

Churchill reiterated that from his political experiences, the Soviet Union carried out the agreements it concluded with other countries. I noticed that Churchill actually had a lot of experience with the Soviet Union, while the Americans, in particular those who were currently in power in the United States, had no such experience.

Churchill then stressed that the French also wanted to convene a meeting with the Soviet Union, and that he, Churchill, was confident that no matter who represented France at the Bermuda meeting[[8]](#footnote-8), France would join Britain in firmly defending the proposal on the need to improve relations with the Soviet Union and to convene a meeting of the Great Powers with the participation of the Soviet Union.

Continuing to reminisce, Churchill expressed regret that the agreement reached with the Soviet Union during the Second World War could not bear fruition due to the fact that he, Churchill, in the midst of the Potsdam Conference, had not been in power, and his successors (an allusion to Attlee), with no experience of relations with the Soviet Union, had been unable to convince the Americans of the possibility and necessity of reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union.

In his concluding remarks, Churchill reiterated his determination to persuade Eisenhower of the need to improve relations with the Soviet Union and the need for a meeting between the heads of the Great Powers.

Churchill apologised that as he had been very busy at the 2 June coronation[[9]](#footnote-9) , he had been unable to send me a timely copy of his letter to Comrade V.M. Molotov. He immediately called the secretary and demanded from him to prepare a text of his letter addressed to me. The message was attached to this letter, and [Churchill] asked me to read the message in his presence. Then he reiterated his desire to "build bridges rather than build barriers" in the relationship between Britain and the Soviet Union, and between East and West.

Taking advantage of the meeting with Churchill, I have fulfilled the task given to me to convey thanks to Churchill, from Comrade G.M. Malenkov and Comrade V.M. Molotov for the greetings that Churchill sent them through Comrade A.A. Gromyko before his departure from Moscow, .

Churchill warmly thanked me for this and said that from his side he would send G.M. Malenkov and V.M. Molotov confirmation that their personal messages had been received and that he wishes to thank them. Churchill took me into a room that had been prepared for the 3 June opening of the meeting of Prime Ministers of the British Commonwealth[[10]](#footnote-10). On a large table inscriptions were arranged denoting the locations for each of the Prime Ministers.

When I remarked that the Prime Minister was preparing for the meeting, Churchill replied that he was sure that all Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth would fully support him in an effort to improve international relations and in the convening of the meeting of the great powers with the participation of the Soviet Union.

With this, the conversation, which lasted about 40 minutes, was over. Secretary to the Ambassador, Comrade A.M. Strelkov, was in attendance.

Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain, Ya. A. Malik

[FPARF, f. 6, inv. 12а, fold. 47, file 217, pp. 11–17]

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1. “Churchill’s secret and personal message” was passed to Molotov on 2 June 1953 then distributed among the Soviet leadership. In his message, Churchill accentuated that the meeting of the leaders of the three Western powers at Bermuda (it was planned for June 1953, but only took place in December on account of the illness of the British Prime Minister and the political crisis in France) would become an opportunity to build bridges between East and West, starting with the issue of prisoners of war in Korea. All attempts by the British leadership in 1953 to persuade the Soviet side to talks at the highest level came to naught. See: N. I. Egorova. Evropeiskaia bezopasnostꞌ, 1954—1955 gg.: poiski novykh pokhodov // Kholodnaia voina. 1945—1963 gg. Istoricheskaia retrospektiva: Sb. st. М., 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An article published in *Pravda* on 13 May 1953 on Churchill’s speech began by mentioning the Prime Minister’s words on the necessity of securing a rapid armistice in Korea. In general the article maintained a neutral tone, and reflected on all fundamental tenets of Churchill’s speech that related to the Soviet Union. See: Vystuplenie premꞌer-minstra Cherchillia v angliiskoi palate obshchin // Pravda. № 133. 13 maia 1953. S. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his speech to the House of Commons on 11 May 1953, Churchill called for the development of friendly relations with the Soviet Union while preserving the necessity of strengthening the defensive capability and unity of the West. He also noted that the main event of recent times was the change in the position of the Soviet leadership following the death of Stalin. Churchill declared that the British Government would welcome ‘every sign of improvement in our relations with Russia.’ For a full exposition of the debate of 11 May see Hansard vol. 515 cc883-1004 (11 May 1953)// < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1953/may/11/foreign-affairs#column_883> > [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Soviet leadership regarded the British initiative with mistrust in so far as they considered Great Britain a channel for promotion of US interests. See: N. I. Egorova. Evropeiskaia bezopasnostꞌ, 1954—1955 gg.: poiski novykh podkhodov // Kholodnaia voina. 1945—1963 gg. Istoricheskaia retrospektiva: Sb. st. М., 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The so-called “percentages agreement” was reached between Stalin and Churchill during the Moscow conference of 1944 during talks behind the closed doors talks on the evening of 9 October. A proposal was made by the British Prime Minister, written by hand on a small piece of rough paper. It was in essence a delineation of spheres of influence in post-war Southern and Eastern Europe; Churchill proposed the following ratios between the USSR and Great Britain in, respectively: Romania – 90/10, Bulgaria – 75/25, Greece – 10/90, Yugoslavia – 50/50 and Hungary – 50/50. Subsequent correction was made at a meeting between A. Eden and V.M. Molotov on the evening of 10 October. In the end, the British side agreed to amend the ratio for Hungary and Bulgaria to 80:20 in favour of the USSR. Consequently, the difference between Churchill’s words in 1953 and the initial agreement lay firstly in the percentages given to Bulgaria, and secondly in the Prime Minister neglecting to mention any changes that had been made to the percentages in respect to Hungary. For more detail on this subject see: Resis A. The Churchill-Stalin Secret "Percentages" Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944 // The American Historical Review. 1978. Vol. 83. No. 2. P. 368-387; Zapisꞌ besedy tov. I.V. Stalina s Cherchillem 9 oktiabria 1944 goda v 22 chasa //Rzheshevskii О.А. Stalin i Cherchillꞌ. Vstrechi. Besedy. Diskussii: Dokumenty, kommentarii, 1941–1945. М., 2004. S. 418-429. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Churchill had already published the facts about the agreement in November 1953 when the sixth, and last, volume of his Second World War memoirs came out,; the volume encompassed the period from June 1944 until the end of the war: Churchill W.C. Triumph and tragedy. Vol. 6. London, 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This refers to the events of December 1944 when Churchill approved comprehensive, including military, measures to support the Greek Government-in-Exile in fighting its opponents, the left-wing forces of EAM-ELAS. EAM-ELAS’ military formations had led the armed resistance against Nazi Germany and had taken part in the liberation of Athens and Thessaloniki. The Prime Minister tried to secure an armistice by means of a visit to Athens on 25 December 1944, but this attempt failed. See: Kalinin А.А., Iungblud V.Т. Gretsiia v amerikano-britanskikh otnosheniiakh v 1939–1945 gg. Kirov, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On 5 May 1953, the Prime Minister René Mayer lost a confidence vote in the National Assembly (328 against, 244 for). This precipitated a political crisis which dragged on until 28 June and ended with the resignation of Mayer. At a meeting of the leaders of the three powers in December 1953, France was represented by the new Prime Minister Joseph Laniel. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The coronation of Elizabeth II took place on 2 June 1953 in the Westminster Abbey. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The sixth Commonwealth Prime Minister’s Conference took place in London, 3-9 June. Representatives from nine states took part; they discussed the truce in Korea, the security of the Suez Canal and aspects of the planned meeting of leaders of the three Western powers in Bermuda. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)