From the telegram of the USSR Ambassador to the U.K., F.T. Gusev, to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, (dated 4 March 1944).

CIPHER TELEGRAM

MOST SECRET

Churchill and his wife had me over for breakfast at their residence at 10 Downing Street. It was in fact my first meeting with the Prime-Minister, except the meeting that took place in October last year, when Churchill returned to me Comrade Stalin’s letter[[1]](#footnote-1). [...]

During the breakfast together with Churchill’s wife, and after the breakfast with Churchill only, we discussed the following topics:

1) Proposing a toast to me, Churchill asked how we say “to your health”. I told him, and he tried to say it in Russian, adding that he decided to study the Russian language so that when he meets Stalin next time he would know something in Russian. [...] Personal meetings, - says Churchill, - give us an opportunity to better understand each other, without paper formulas. My meetings with Stalin were sincere and lacked the tone of all these “scraps of paper”. Churchill did not say it, but it was clear from his words that he refers to his missives and Comrade Stalin’s missives. Churchill further said that when he was in Tehran he spoke with Molotov about the missive that he had to return to me in October last year.

[…] “I believe,” - continued Churchill, - “that if we could meet with the Marshal more often, we would have less difficulties. Now that you start liberating the Baltics, we could fly directly, without flying over the enemy’s territory, but it is now difficult for me at my age to fly at high altitudes.”[…]

During the rest of the conversation Churchill spoke in a conciliatory tone, and his conversation was obviously aimed to make amends for his escapade against me in October last year.

2) Churchill said that the Soviet Government wants to change Badoglio[[2]](#footnote-2)’s Government. He, Churchill, is against the idea of the Allies acting to change the Italian Government, and he thinks that after the Allies take Rome and significantly advance into the Italian territory, we could resume the discussion of this issue and decide what could be done. If we now change Badoglio’s Government, we cannot be sure of the position that will be taken by the Italian sailors. We could lose the Italian Navy[[3]](#footnote-3).

I mentioned that the Italian navy is predominantly under the British Navy’s command. Churchill replied that the Italian Navy is only controlled by the British officers, while the Italian sailors remain on their ships and could sink the ships if they please. Churchill repeated that he is against changing Badoglio’s Government.

3) I asked Churchill if he could tell me how preparation for the major operation is going[[4]](#footnote-4). Churchill replied that the operation is being prepared under the agreed terms. Then, after a pause, he added that the talks between Eden and Molotov in Moscow regarding [handwritten: *aviation*] will be taken into account.

I did not know the details of the talks mentioned by Churchill and tried, by asking further questions, to find out what he meant, but he did not elaborate on his statement, saying that these talks are well-known. “In the next few days,” said Churchill, “I will communicate to Marshal Stalin the date of our campaign, explaining what we are planning to do and what, in its turn, will be required from the Red Army[[5]](#footnote-5).” “You have no reason to fear that we won’t fulfil our obligations,” said Churchill. I said that I had no fears, but I only wanted to find out the Prime-Minister’s view of the preparation for the big operation. As for fulfilling obligations, the Soviet Union has always fulfilled its obligations in full and on time, I told him. “Yes, during the Bolshevik regime you fulfil your obligations. However, Russia let us down in the last war, having signed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Germans[[6]](#footnote-6).” I said that the Prime Minister is well aware of the situation in Russia at that time, when Russia was not prepared for the war and could not continue it. [...]

4) Turkey was mentioned during the conversation. Churchill said that if Turkey changed its position[[7]](#footnote-7), they could provide aid to the USSR via the Straits and the Black Sea.

During the breakfast Churchill’s wife offered me Turkish cigarettes. I joked that probably the Turks want to restrict their participation in the war to supplying the Allies with cigarettes. Churchill’s wife said that the Turks are causing great distress to her husband and that probably they have decided to join the war no sooner that one hour before it’s over.

5) [...] Churchill mentioned that the English pilots took the Soviet military mission to Tito[[8]](#footnote-8), and boasted that the British military mission has been helping Tito for a year already. The English now send supplies to Tito not only by planes, but also by steamers.

[…]

7) During the conversation Churchill touched upon the issue of friendship between the USSR and Great Britain three times. All three countries – the Great Britain, the USA, and the USSR – should set up and maintain mutual friendship. Victory over the enemy and achieving lasting peace depends on this friendship. Achieving peace is a very difficult and complex task. And we must solve this task now. You – the diplomats – should be actively involved in this, and should not wait until the heads of the Governments agree on everything. If we do not establish a lasting friendship, and therefore, a lasting peace, now, when we are completely armed, a new catastrophe will be unavoidable. I said that the Soviet Government has several times declared that it was absolutely prepared to co-operate in establishing strong friendship between our countries, in times of war, as well as in lasting peace. However, the success of co-operation depends not only on the wish and effort of one party. It depends on both parties, on mutual respect of the rights and interests of both parties. Churchill further said that the British people duly respect Russia’s input in the Allies’ enterprise, and wish a lasting friendship with the Russian people. I replied that the Soviet people also wish a lasting friendship with the British people. [...]

During the conversation Churchill spoke in a conciliatory tone, and when I was bidding goodbye to him, he suggested again that I visit factories and plants and promised his help in this matter. Having learnt that I was leaving for the session of the European Consultative Commission straight after the breakfast, Churchill told me: “do work on establishing peace, so that a catastrophe could not repeat. Establishing lasting peace is a difficult task and requires a great effort from us, but we must solve this task.”

# 4 March 1944

GUSEV

[FPARF, f. 059a, inv. 7, fold. 13, file 6, pp. 317–325]

Keywords: Second front, Italy, Turkey, inter-allied relations

1. Sees Document: “The telegram of Soviet Ambassador to the UK, F.T. Gusev, sent to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, 18 October 1943”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Badoglio, Pietro (1871 - 1956) -– Italian Marshal, 1st Duke of Addis Abeba, 1st Marquess of Sabotino, a participant in the ousting of B. Mussolini (1943), the Italian Prime Minister (1943 - 1944). He concluded an armistice with the Allies (1943). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Similar line of reasoning can be found in Churchill and Roosevelt’s joint message to Stalin (23 January 1944). It was sent in view of the approaching deadline (end of January), when, in accordance with the agreed-upon date at the Tehran conference, the British and Americans had to hand over part of the Italian Navy to the USSR. Stalin accepted a compromised version (a transfer of the old battleship "Royal Sovereign" and a light cruiser, with expectation of acquiring Italian ships), while continuing to insist on the need to transfer the Italian destroyers and submarines (letter of 29 January). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This refers to the opening of a second front in the north of France. Gusev’s question was largely linked to the ambassador’s concerns that "Overlord" would once again be postponed. Information about a possible delay in the operation came to Moscow through intelligence channels (reports of fixe-post spies of NKGB USSR, 29 January 1944/ Organy gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny (hereinafter – OGB). T. 5. Kn. 1. M., 2007. p. 114–115). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The American and British military mission in Moscow informed the Soviet General Staff on 21 April of the start date of "Overlord" (this was preceded by a joint message from Churchill and Roosevelt on 18 April). In his reply dated 22 April, Stalin assured the Allies of his readiness to launch an offensive on the Soviet-German front by the same date. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk - signed on 3 March 1918 by representatives of Soviet Russia, on the one side, and representatives of the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey), on the other. In accordance with the Treaty, Russia had to give up large areas of its Empire, including Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and part of Livonia. Soviet troops were withdrawn from Livonia and Estonia, Ukraine, Finland and other territories. After Germany’s defeat in World War I and the signing of the Compiegne armistice agreement, the Soviet government annulled the Treaty on 13 November 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This was in reference to Turkey’s refusal to abandon neutrality and the possible (perhaps tacit) authorization of the passage of Allied ships through the Black Sea straits. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Soviet military mission to Tito was headed by Lt. Gen. N.V. Korneev, whose expedition to Yugoslavia was agreed upon at the Tehran conference. With the help of the British, they arrived in Cyprus, from where they departed in February for their intended destination. The British reviews of Korneev's mission had been very positive. "General Korneev and his numerous staff are very friendly and easy to get on with and we are on excellent terms with them” (Report by Brigadier Maclean on the Present Military and Political Situation in Yugoslavia, March 1944, 18/03/1944 (in: WP (44) 196) // TNA , CAB 66/48). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)