From the diary People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR V.M. Molotov, 17 August 1944.

SECRET

MEETING WITH THE US AMBASSADOR HARRIMAN

AND THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR KERR[[1]](#footnote-1)

Kerr says that he and the American Ambassador have come with a mission which they consider very serious. Following the instructions of the American and the British Governments he and Harriman asked for a meeting with Marshal Stalin, as the American and the British Governments are seriously worried by the Soviet Government’s refusal to assist the American operations on delivering armament to Warsaw to help the Poles fighting there. Kerr was very disappointed when he received Molotov’s letter[[2]](#footnote-2) this evening, in which Molotov informed that the British aircrafts delivering armament to Warsaw are not welcomed on Soviet territory in case they, following an accident, cannot return to their bases.

Kerr would like to openly say that from Molotov’s letter he has the impression that the British aircrafts leaving bases in Italy or any other places to provide assistance to Warsaw will not be allowed to land on Soviet territory in case of an accident.

[…]

Molotov says that Kerr’s statement is part right and part wrong. It is absolute fact that there has been no incident when the British or American pilots who encountered difficulties while on a mission were not welcome to the Soviet territory. On the contrary, they were always welcome, and will continue to be welcome in future.

Hence, from the point of view of relations between the Allies and the friendly position of the Soviet Union, the Ambassador cannot have any doubts in this respect. The Warsaw issue does not fall into this category, as it is very special. The thing is that the Soviet Government thinks the Warsaw operation is an adventurist enterprise that may lead to pointless losses, and those who started it will be the ones to blame. Therefore, the Soviet Government does not want to have anything to do with this operation and does not want to bear any responsibility for it, including responsibility for the aircrafts that will be sent to provide help to Warsaw.

This was communicated in TASS disclaimer published on 13 August, where it was stated that the Soviet Government cannot bear any responsibility, but also pointed to smear campaign against the Soviet Union in the Polish press and Polish radiobroadcast that has been underway since early August and has been accusing the Soviet Government of letting the residents of Warsaw down. Molotov thinks that the persons who started the adventurist Warsaw operation want to avoid responsibility and shift it onto the Soviet Government.

Molotov would like to acquaint Kerr and Harriman with the messages that Marshal I.V. Stalin sent yesterday to Churchill and Mikolajczyk[[3]](#footnote-3) replying to their messages regarding help to Warsaw.

Molotov reads out Comrade I.V. Stalin’s messages.

[…]

Kerr replies that the issue is clear, but he and Harriman are instructed to expound the American and the British Governments’ standpoints.

Having received consent to this, Kerr says that, according to the American and the British Governments, this issue is of the utmost importance. The issue is much wider than simply the fate of the Polish population in Warsaw. The American and the British Governments are very anxious about not only the Soviet–Polish relations, but also about the relations between Great Britain, the USA, and the USSR. The American and the British Governments believe that the Poles in Warsaw fight for the common cause, and both Governments believe that the three Governments should do everything within their powers to support the Poles’ fight, as the Poles are exterminating the Germans in this fight. Churchill once said that every man who is fighting the Germans will get help and will be a friend of the Allies[[4]](#footnote-4).

The American and the British Governments believe that the Soviet Government has the same view. The British and the Americans have watched for a long time the success of partisans in the Soviet Union, and both Governments acknowledge the great contribution made by Soviet partisans even at times when they did not have any armament. Both Governments felt much the same towards the Poles who fight against the Germans, regardless of these Poles’ political views, the same attitude is towards the Yugoslavs, and the lately the same position of the British and the American Governments has been proclaimed towards the French who fight with the Germans within France.

Some time ago the Soviet press criticised the official Polish underground movement for being seemingly inactive, and at the same time the Soviet radio called for the Poles to rise against the Germans, much in the same way as the British radio did for the French. The moral obligation of the American, the British and the Soviet Governments is to provide help to those who risk their lives in order to kill a German following these calls. Therefore, the British and the American Governments do not take into account the political complexion and the scale of the resistance in Warsaw. The information received by them indicates that all the Poles are united in this fight.

The moral obligation of these Governments is to do everything possible to help the heroic people of Warsaw, and the two Governments are doing it at a great cost and to the detriment of important tasks in other regions. It was said that the Warsaw operation is a mistake and that it was undertaken without consulting with the Allies. Let it be so. But the people in Warsaw have been fighting for 17 days already. These are patriots who are fighting for their country and for the common cause. Let us put ourselves in their shoes. They have lived five years under the German yoke. Can we really reproach them that they acted too hurriedly when they heard the boom of the Soviet guns in the suburbs of Warsaw? As diplomats, we could possibly blame them of this. But as humans we cannot do so. Their operation was called adventurous, as they do not have tanks, aviation, and artillery. This may be an adventurous operation. But they are killing Germans in their fight, and every German killed is a step towards victory.

In his latest conversation with Mikolajczyk, Marshal Stalin promised to help the Poles in Warsaw. Molotov said that there were two attempts to help, and a Soviet officer was killed during one of the attempts. Eden has recently communicated to Molotov that the British, in spite of the geographic and other difficulties, are sending aircrafts from Italy to help Warsaw. On 14 August the Americans suggested a difficult and risky operation in order to help Warsaw. The Soviet Government said that it cannot be involved in the operation. However, without the Soviet Government’s participation the planned operation cannot be carried out.

When the allies are as close as the British, the Americans and the Russians are now, they may talk among themselves openly, as Kerr has been reminded recently by Molotov. Presently Kerr would like to express the belief of the American and the British Governments that the lack of co-operation from the Soviet side will be detrimental to the Soviet-Polish relations. The British, as well as the Americans, cannot understand why the Soviet Government had refused to co-operate in this matter.

Harriman says that the American bombers can operate from their bases in Italy and Britain within certain physical limits. They can fly to Warsaw, but with a small load and without fighters’ escort. If the American fighters are allowed to land at the aerodromes near Poltava[[5]](#footnote-5), it will become possible to organise their escort by fighters.

[…]

Molotov can fully understand the feelings that will be invoked in America and among the American armed forces, if it becomes known that the American pilots are forced to make difficult flights without fighters’ escorts, whilst they could fly with such escorts if they were allowed to land at Soviet airbases.

In his letter to him, Harriman, Vyshinsky pointed out that the Soviet Government does not object against the Americans’ operations aimed at providing supplies to Warsaw. But Harriman must state that if these operations are carried out without permission to use Soviet bases, it will entail needless deaths of many Americans. Therefore Harriman is sure that Molotov, as well as Marshal Stalin, will provide their consent for Americans to use Soviet airbases.

Now Harriman would like to move on to discussing the general issue of helping the Poles in Warsaw. This issue is being closely followed in the USA. This issue is considered an important precedent of co-operation in resolving common problems. The President has stated several times in his messages to Marshal Stalin, and has instructed him, Harriman, to underline it here, that the President considers it his goal to unite all the Poles for the fight against the Germans. To deny help to the Poles, who are now fighting in Warsaw, is a step that will never be understood in the United States, whatever the Polish leaders’ mistakes have been and whoever has been responsible for starting this Polish operation. […] If the President does not succeed in persuading the Soviet Union to change its mind, the President will be blamed, as the co-operation between the United States and the Soviet Union will be seen as ineffective and non- delivering what was expected of it[[6]](#footnote-6). […]

Kerr would like to say that there is another side that, according to the American and the British Governments, should not be overlooked. Kerr is referring to the effect that the Soviet Government’s decision will have upon Mikolajczyk’s position and the resolution of the Soviet-Polish problem. Eden told Kerr, that Mikolajczyk returned to London with the intention to build his policy on the faith in the Soviet Government’s good will, and that Mikolajczyk and his colleagues are prepared to go the extra mile to achieve the solution that would be desirable for the Soviet Government and to unite all the Polish political forces on the basis of the policy of friendship with the Soviet Government.

Mikolajczyk’s main trump card in his difficult struggle in London is Marshal Stalin’s promise to help Warsaw that he made to Mikolajczyk on 9 August. Warsaw’s fate is being followed with great anxiety by the Polish troops fighting in Normandy, in Italy and other places. If the current decision of the Soviet Government remains in force, Mikolajczyk’s personal position will be fatally undermined. Kerr will not speak of the fact that the Soviet Government, being a great power, may afford to ignore the numerous malicious comments regarding the Warsaw uprising. However, if any of us fail to act now, not only will this encourage the existing malicious critics, but will also incite those who have so far been silent, to come forward with malicious comments. Kerr does not need to say that the British Government will do its best to present the facts in the best light possible.

Thus, Kerr and Harriman came to ask the Soviet Government, via Molotov, to reconsider its decision. [...]

Molotov says that he has little to add to what he had said previously, as he had announced the position of the Soviet party before Kerr and Harriman made their statements. Kerr said that the position of the Soviet Government was clear to him. Molotov hopes that it is clear to Harriman, too. Molotov considers it unnecessary to prove that what the Soviet Government and Soviet people desire most of all is to defeat the Germans. There is no need to prove it, as it is an axiom. There is no need to prove that the Soviet people suffered more substantial losses than anyone else in the struggle for the common cause, and for the liberation of their own country and of Poland, in particular.

[…]

Molotov says that it gives us the right to refuse to support the adventurous operation, which would increase in the number of needless losses. The Soviet Government cannot participate in this operation and cannot bear any direct or indirect responsibility for the enterprise that is not justified by the interests of Poland, the Polish people, or by the interests of the Allies.

[…]

Kerr spoke of Mikolajczyk’s good intentions upon his return to London. Molotov will not take upon himself to judge whether this position of Mikolajczyk’s will prevail, or other Polish emigrants’ position will influence the position of Mikolajczyk’s milieu. Up until now, the Polish emigrant milieu, hostile to the Soviet Union, prevailed, including most recently, when the Warsaw operation issue arose.

Today, as well as yesterday, as well as during many previous months, Soviet troops are fighting extremely hard not only for their Motherland but for the common cause. Maybe someone did more than the Soviet troops. It is hardly likely that any of our allies, to say nothing of the wider masses of Britain and America, are looking forward for the Soviet Army to learn about the fact that the refusal of the Soviet Government to support the adventurous operation started by a few presumptuous Polish emigrant adventurists will be used as pretext to start hostile campaign against our country.

Molotov would like to say that he hopes that the British and American Governments, having acquainted themselves with the facts and the position of the Soviet Government on the operation in Warsaw, in particular, having read Marshal Stalin’s messages to Churchill and Mikolajczyk, will appreciate the position of the Soviet Government. He, Molotov, may only assure Kerr and Harriman that the Soviet Government is sure that its position is right, and as it is so sure of its being right, it will not ... change its position.

[…]

Harriman says that he would like to ask Molotov a question which is not clear to him. On 9 August Marshal Stalin said to Mikolajczyk that he agrees to help the Poles in Warsaw. Between 9 and 14 August the position of the Soviet Government has changed. Harriman would like to know what had happened that made the Soviet Government change its position. What information has been received during this period of time by the Soviet Government?

[…]

Molotov replies that the information received by the Soviet Government proved that the Warsaw enterprise has been started by the adventurists from London and that these adventurists are trying to use this enterprise for the purposes hostile to the Soviet Union, spreading slander about the Soviet Union. This smear campaign is underway in the Polish press and radio, and it exposes those who would like to cover up their responsibility for the Warsaw enterprise.

As soon as the nature of the Warsaw enterprise had been exposed, a TASS disclaimer was published, which Harriman must know from Sunday papers.

[…]

Harriman asks if Molotov has the information that the people who are fighting in Warsaw are susceptible the public statements that Molotov is complaining about, or they are patriots fighting for their country.

Molotov replies that he has no doubt that among the people in Warsaw there are many honest and true patriots who are victims of an adventurous provocation. However, the Soviet Government would not like to increase the number of losses by supporting this adventurous enterprise.

Harriman says that it is not clear how supplying the patriots in Warsaw could increase their losses. Does Molotov think that it would be better to leave these people to the mercy of fate and let them die?

Molotov replies that the support provided to the leaders of the adventurous operation would mean increase in losses. It is hard to dispute it. Several hundreds of guns and a certain amount of bullets will not improve the situation of the people in Warsaw, while the number of losses will go up.

Harriman says that he has been told that Radio Moscow in the end of July had called for the Poles to rise and start the fight in the city streets, and to thus expedite the liberation of their motherland[[7]](#footnote-7).

Molotov replies that certainly if the Warsaw uprising had been co-ordinated with the Soviet command authorities, it would have been of great help. However, the people who started it did not want to do it and committed a crime against their own people. Molotov did not read what Harriman is talking about. He has no doubts that the Soviet radio did not make such calls. However, Molotov has no doubts that calls to support the Red Army from within Warsaw would have been justified when the Red Army, equipped with aircrafts, tanks and artillery, would approach Warsaw. However, this has not been done, and the Warsaw enterprise was a sheer adventure started by a few instigators in Warsaw representing the Polish emigrants.

[…]

Molotov replies that he would like to inform Harriman of the Soviet airfields that had been used by the American air forces during the summer period. Molotov knows that, as the summer period of the American aircrafts’ operations is now over, and the Soviet command authorities need to use these airfields, the Soviet command authorities plan to suggest to the American command authorities to reconsider the use of these airfields by the American aircrafts.

Harriman replies that the use of these airfields had been granted not till the end of summer, but till the end of war.

Molotov replies that from Harriman’s communications it can be seen that only one flight per month is planned to be made from these airfields in winter time. At the same time, the Soviet command authorities need these airfields, as the front line has moved to the West.

Harriman replies that the he had previously made proposals on how to improve the airfield conditions, to motorise them and to move them closer to the front line as the latter moves on. If the Americans are refused to use the Soviet airfields, it will lead to catastrophic results for the co-operation between our countries, especially after the successes achieved in the operations that had been carried out from these Soviet airbases.

Molotov says that these airfields have not been used a lot recently.

Harriman replies that he would like to have an opportunity to set forth in detail the results that have been achieved in the operations carried out from these airfields. There was a period of time when the airfields were not used, but this was due to a certain accident. On the whole, owing to the fact that the American bombers were using the Soviet airbases, a number of important industrial objects in Germany have been reached.

Molotov says that he only wanted to warn Harriman that such issue would be raised by the Soviet command authorities.

[…]

Recorded [signature] (V. Pavlov[[8]](#footnote-8))

[FPARF, f. 06, inv. 6, fold. 23, file 242, pp. 15–29]

Keywords: Poland

1. This meeting was a result of the instructions London sent to Kerr. Alarmed by the Soviet position and the fact that "issues at stake are ”... of such vital importance, going as they do far beyond the immediate fate of the Polish population of Warsaw,” London ordered the Ambassador to arrange a meeting with Stalin, or, if not possible, with Molotov, "to bring home to them the very serious view which His Majesty's Government take of their present attitude and our deep anxiety regarding its probable effect not only upon Polish-Soviet but also upon future Anglo-Soviet relations. Telegram to Kerr was approved by the Cabinet on August 16 (W.M. (44) 107th Conclusions, Minute 1, Conf. Annex, 16/08/1944 // TNA, CAB 65/47). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: Letter from the USSR People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, V.M. Molotov, to the British Ambassador to the USSR, A. Kerr, 16 August 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: Letter from the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, I.V. Stalin, to the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in exile S. Mikołajczyk, 16 August 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By all appearances, this is in reference to Churchill’s well-known phrase from the famous radio broadcast on 22 June 1941: " Any man or State who fights against Nazism will have our aid”. [http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/410622d.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Between June and September 1944, the US Air Force carried out shuttle bombing of Germany and its allies (Operation Frantic) from the airfields near Poltava. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In general, the events of the Warsaw Uprising and the Soviet reaction to it have become an important milestone in the evolution of the Harriman’s position: "For him, the Warsaw Uprising was the moment of truth, which forced him to look not only at Stalin’s methods but also policy objectives in a new light" (Pechatnov V.O. Moskovskoye posol’stvo Аverella Garrimana (1943 – 1946) // Novaya i noveyshaya istoriya. 2002. №3. p. 196). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The question of whether there were or weren’t any Soviet radio appeals for an uprising in Warsaw was the subject of a special investigation, the results of which were reported to Stalin. The main conclusion was: "The materials of the All-Union Radio broadcasts was not directly or indirectly calling for an uprising in Warsaw." See more: Pol’sha v XX veke. Ocherki politicheskoy istorii. p. 404–405. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pavlov, Vladimir Nikolaevich (1915 - 1993) - Soviet diplomat, a member of the central apparatus of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1941 -1947, until 1946 - the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR), adviser to the Soviet Embassy in the United Kingdom (1947 -1949), Head of the European II Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (1949 -1952), and during the war he translated Stalin’s and Molotov’s conversations. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)