Telegram from the Prime Minister W. Churchill to the Foreign Secretary A. Eden, 4 May 1945

COPY

PRIME MINISTER’S PERSONAL TELEGRAM SERIAL NO T.754/5

(CYPHER) P R I S E C

FROM THE FOREIGN OFFICE TO THE UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION, SAN FRANCISCO.

No. 321 D. 1.55 p.m. May 4th, 1945.

May 4TH, 1945.

DEDIP

Following from Prime Minister to Mr. Eden.

PERSONAL AND TOP SECRET

YOUR NOS. 84, 85 and 98 of May 1st.

1. I consider that the Polish deadlock can now probably only be resolved at a conference between the three Heads of Governments in some unshattered town in Germany, if such can be found. This should take place at latest at the beginning of July. I propose to telegraph a suggestion to President Truman[[1]](#footnote-1) about his visit here and the further indispensable meeting of the three major Powers. Meanwhile I think it would be a mistake to alter our position or to announce we were content with one-third or even forty per cent.

2. The Polish problem may be easier to settle when set in relation to the now numerous outstanding questions of the utmost gravity which require urgent settlement with the Russians. I fear terrible things have happened during the Russian advance through Germany to the Elbe. The proposed withdrawal of the United States Army to the occupational lines which were arranged with the Russians and Americans in Quebec and which were marked in yellow on the maps we studied there, would mean the tide of Russian domination sweeping forward 120 miles on a front of 300 or 400 miles. This would be an event which, if it occurred, would be one of the most melancholy in history. After it was over and the territory occupied by the Russians, Poland would be completely engulfed and buried deep in Russian-occupied lands. What would in fact be the Russian frontier would run from the North Cape in Norway, along the Finnish-Swedish frontier, across the Baltic to a point just east of Lubeck along the at present agreed line of occupation and long the frontiers of Austria which is normally to be in quadruple occupation, and half-way across that country to the Isonzo River behind which Tito and Russia will claim everything to the east. Thus the territories under Russian control would include the Baltic Provinces, all of Germany to the occupational line, all Czechoslovakia, a large part of Austria, the whole of Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, until Greece in her present tottering condition is reached. It would include all the great capitals of middle Europe including Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia. The position of Turkey and Constantinople will certainly come immediately into discussion.

3. This constitutes an event in the history of Europe to which there has been no parallel, and which has not been faced by the Allies in their long and hazardous struggle. The Russian demands on Germany for reparations alone will be such at any rate for many years, during which time Poland will sink with many other States into the vast zone of Russian-controlled Europe, not necessarily economically Sovietised but police-governed.

4. It is just about time that these formidable issues were examined between the principal Powers as a whole. We have several powerful bargaining counters on our side, the use of which might make for a peaceful agreement. First, the Allies ought not to retreat from their present positions to the occupational line until we are satisfied about Poland and also about the temporary character of the Russian occupation of Germany, and the conditions to be established in the Russianised or Russian-controlled countries in the Balkans. Secondly, we may be able to please them about the exits from the Black Sea and the Baltic as part of a general settlement[[2]](#footnote-2). All these matters can only be settled before the United States Armies in Europe[[3]](#footnote-3) are weakened. If they are not settled before the United States Armies withdraw from Europe and the Western world folds up its war machines, there are no prospects of a satisfactory solution and very little of preventing a third World War. It is to this early and speedy showdown and settlement with Russia that we must now turn our hopes. Meanwhile I am against weakening our claim against Russia on behalf of Poland in any way. I think it should stand where it was put in the telegrams from the President and me[[4]](#footnote-4).

[TNA, PREM 3/356/12]

Keywords: inter-allied relations, post-war order

1. The corresponding message was sent by Churchill to Truman on 6 May (№34). See: Defending the West. P. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Coupling” thinking about the Black Sea Straits and the Kiel Canal was not only typical of Churchill. In July 1945, while preparing for the Potsdam conference, the Foreign Office asked the Chiefs of Staff to hasten in defining a position on the question of the Kiel Canal in view of its emergence in Berlin as a result of the association of ideas with the question of the Straits (From to COS Secretary, 06/07/1945 (in: C.O.S. (45) 444 // TNA, CAB 80/95). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Already on 2 May a preliminary version of the programme for the withdrawal of US air forces from Europe was received in London (See: C.O.S. (45) 319 (0), 07/05/45 // TNA, CAB 80/94). The conversation between Eden, Marshall and Stimson on 14 May was permeated with anxiety about planned American armed force withdrawals from Europe (Eden to Churchill, 14/05/1945 // TNA, PREM 3/473). After talking with Eden, Marshall held a searching conversation on 16 May with the British military representative in Washington, Field Marshal H. Wilson. The Head of the Army Staff of the USA explained to the British Field Marshal that by December 1945, of the 3.27 million American officers and men then deployed on the European continent, less than half – 1.56 million – would remain. (Précis of Telegram from Maitland-Wilson to the British COS, 16/05/1945 (Annex to C.P. (45) 30) // TNA, CAB 66/66). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Churchill’s message to Stalin of 28 April and Truman’s message to Stalin of 4 May. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)