Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, A. Eden, to the British Prime Minister W. Churchill, 17 July 1945

PRIME MINISTER.

You mentioned in conversation yesterday that the Russian policy was now one of aggrandisement. This is undoubtedly true. And, considering in this light the additions which Molotov told me yesterday he wished to make to our Agenda, I find them disquieting. Russia has no direct interest in such matters as Tangier and the Levant, nor in countries to be placed under trusteeship. This last is, in any event, a matter for the new World Organisation and not for us here. We had much difficulty with the Russians about trusteeship at San Francisco[[1]](#footnote-1). The truth is that on any and every point, Russia tries to seize all that she can and she uses these meetings to grab as much as she can get.

2. At previous meetings such as Tehran and Yalta we have met in the knowledge that Russia was bearing a heavy burden in this war and that her casualties and the devastation of her country were worse than anything that we or the Americans were suffering. But now all this is over. Russia is not losing a man at the present time. She is not at war with Japan and yet she is doing her utmost to demand more of China than was agreed.

3. To meet this situation we have not many cards in our hand. One of them, however, is the possession of the German Fleet[[2]](#footnote-2). I agree with the Admiralty view that it would be best if this Fleet were sunk. But, in any event, we must not, I am sure, yield a single German ship in our possession until we have obtained satisfaction for our interest, which the Russians are treating with contempt in all the countries where their authority holds sway. Our oil interest in Romania (spelt originally Romania) is one example of this[[3]](#footnote-3). On the political side there are many subjects with which I have troubled you in earlier minutes, but most urgent is to get agreement over the withdrawal of troops from Persia. The independence of that country is important to us. Unless we can begin the withdrawal soon, it is clear from Bullard’s telegrams[[4]](#footnote-4) that North Persia will be completely sovietised[[5]](#footnote-5).

4. All this brings me to the question of Russian access to the great seas. I know that you feel that her demands in this respect are just, and personally I agree with you that there is no reason why Russia should not be allowed free access to the Mediterranean. At the same time, I feel that it would be unwise to speak about this to the Russians at this meeting. We told them before that we were in favour of revising the Montreux Convention. What has been their response? To make other demands on Turkey which would result in placing Constantinople under Russian guns and would probably be the first stage in the subjection of Turkey to Russia[[6]](#footnote-6). One must also remember that while we agree that the Russians should be free to enter the Mediterranean, they have not yet freedom to get out of it. Having achieved what they desire about Turkey, Russia’s next request may be for a position at Tangier where they may give us much more trouble. And is their interest in the Lebanon a first stage to an interest in Egypt, which is quite the last place where want them, particularly since that country with its rich Pashas and impoverished fellahin would be a ready pretty to Communism? If we were to talk generously to the Russians this time about access to the wider oceans, I fear that they would only regard it as an indication that we had not been shocked by their demands on Turkey and would proceed to make more and more demands on Persia and on other countries in the Middle East.

5. Forgive this sermon, with all of which I feel sure you will agree. But reading through our briefs and documents again last night I am deeply concerned at the pattern of Russian policy, which becomes clearer as they become more brazen every day.

AE [Anthony Eden’s Signature]

17th July 1945.

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1. The British, worried that the trusteeship arrangements within the framework of the UN would become an instrument for the gradual disintegration of the British Empire, opposed proposals to widen the possibilities for international control over trusteeship territories. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The First Sea Lord Admiral Cunningham was still noting with pleasure in mid-May that ‘it is believed that no important [German] naval unit has fallen undamaged into Russian hands’. In solidarity with the decision of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that ships captured in German ports by British and American forces before the general surrender of Germany should be at their individual disposal, he called for the same approach in relation to ships lying in ports in Denmark and the Netherlands. Among other things, this course of action was necessary to his mind in order to strengthen their position in subsequent talks with the Russians (C.O.S. (45) 338 (O), 15/05/45 // TNA, CAB 80/94). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This refers primarily to the issue of the removal by the Soviet authorities of oil production equipment from Romania. The USSR regarded this equipment as a trophy previously belonging to the Germans; Great Britain regarded it as British property temporarily held by the Germans. At the beginning of 1945 the removal of equipment was stopped. However, the British continued to insist either on its return, or on compensation for it as well as the speedy reconstruction of those oil facilities in Romania in which British capital had been invested. See Eden’s note discussing oil facilities in Romania that was passed to Molotov on 10 February 1945 (in Krymskaia konferentsiia. S. 189). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bullard, Reader William (1885 – 1976) – British diplomat, Minister, later Ambassador to Iran (1939 – 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The emphasis on a rapid withdrawal of British troops as a means of bringing about a Soviet withdrawal and also of lowering the general level of anti-British feeling in the run up to elections for the Majlis (which were scheduled for December 1945) was characteristic of the Foreign Office at this time and later. See: C.O.S. (45) 560 (O), Note by War Office, 02/09/1945 // TNA, CAB 80/97. At the same time, British diplomats, anxious that troop withdrawals did not end the security provided for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s oil deposits, were trying to encourage the Iranian army to more active engagement in the fight against tribes in the south-west of the country (Copy of a Letter from FO to COS, 07/09/1945 (in: C.O.S. (45) 568 (O)) // TNA, CAB 80/97). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In its unambiguous refusal of the Soviet demand for bases in the region of the Straits, the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff were united. Prepared by the military in the corridors of the Berlin conference, the report entitled ‘Montreux Convention and Security of the Baltic’ (12 July) spoke of the desirability of upholding the status quo in respect of the Straits; Soviet requests for right of passage at time of war for their ships ‘should be strongly resisted’. Moreover, just like Eden, the Chiefs of Staff considered the demands of the USSR as a first step by Moscow in the realisation of a long-term foreign policy programme in the Mediterranean: ‘Account must also be taken of the two main Mediterranean gateways, namely, the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. The Russians have already shown an interest in the former by expressing a wish to take part in Tangier discussions. So far, they have shown no signs of raising the question of control of the Suez Canal, but we must take into account the possibility that they may do so.’ (C.O.S. (45) 459 (O), Report by COS, 12/07/1945 // TNA, CAB 80/95). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)