Telegram from the Foreign Secretary, E. Bevin, to the Prime Minister, C. Attlee, on the meeting between him and Stalin, 20 December 1945

Following for the Prime Minister.

I saw Stalin last night. We began by discussing Persia, and Stalin affected to be afraid of acts of sabotage by the Persians against Baku and the oil wells. I said it was important to bring misgivings into the open and that there was a feeling at home that the Soviet Government were thinking of incorporating Azerbaijan into Russia.[[1]](#footnote-1) Stalin said he had no idea of incorporating any part of Iran into the Soviet Union, but that he must safeguard the oil of Baku against diversionary activities. I then mentioned the proposal for the establishment of provincial councils throughout Iran and asked whether we could not get a tripartite commission to advise and assist the Persian Government over this. Stalin said that he would study the matter and thought it possible that we might be able to agree on this.

2. I then turned to Turkey and said that as we were allied with that country, we were anxious to know the Soviet Government’s intentions. Stalin said there were two questions. Firstly the Straits, which the Turks could close at will. Secondly there were the provinces in Turkey inhabited by Georgians and Armenians where the old frontier must be restored. But all talk of war against Turkey was rubbish. When I asked him how the matter should be settled Stalin said by negotiation with Turkey or with the Allies. On my asking him what exactly the Soviet Government wanted, Stalin said they wished to regain the frontier which existed before the Treaty of 1921. I pointed out that Russia had not been in possession of these provinces for long; Stalin admitted this but said that the population was Georgian and Armenian and had always been so. As regards the Straits, Stalin said that his claim for a base still stood. The Soviet Government did not claim the right to close the Straits themselves but they did not wish Turkey to be able to do so either. When I asked what the situation would be if Turkey were at war, Stalin said that Turkey’s interests should come first. She could then close the Straits and those interested in the defence of the Straits should come to her assistance. I said I should like to see definite proposals formulated by the Soviet Government so that we could consider whether a Conference should be called. I was anxious not to destroy Turkey’s free and independent position. It was agreed that the question could not be settled at the present Conference, but I expressed hope that Turkey need not continue her present state of mobilisation, which was due to her fear of the Soviet Union. Stalin said she had no need to be frightened.

3. I then referred to the Dodecanese. The Soviet Government had no interest there and His Majesty’s Government would like to transfer the administration to Greece and to withdraw British troops. We had no designs on the islands. Stalin said he would think the matter over.

4. I then turned to the question of the inclusion of India in the Conference to discuss the peace treaties, and Stalin and I went through the usual arguments about whether India is a sovereign State. I informed him of the action we were taking in the near future to assist India’s advance towards autonomy and, in reply to Stalin’s objection that the Soviet Government had no relations with India, [I] said that I would be willing to help establish them. I explained our difficulties in India and said that if she were admitted to the Conference and were retained on the Far Eastern Commission that would help. Stalin said that His Majesty’s Government must give some compensation in return, to which I said that the admission of the Baltic States raised difficulties for the United States Government and I though the inclusion of the Ukraine and Belorussia was sufficient counter balance. Stalin asked for time to consider the matter.

5. In conclusion I said that I would always do my best to remove every difficulty arising between the two governments and that if Stalin thought we were taking a line that might cause difficulty I hoped he would let me know at once. Stalin said that that followed the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, to which I replied that I wanted to go beyond its terms and to implement it in the spirit. I personally should be quite ready to extend its duration from 20 to 50 years. If the three governments could keep the spirit of treaties, it would be along time before another war occurred. Stalin agreed but said that Russia had no treaty with the United States.

6. Before leaving I said I wished to raise one other question, namely the Western bloc. I explained that we must have some arrangement with France and other neighbouring countries like that which Russia had with her neighbours. But I would do nothing against the Soviet Government and would always keep the Generalissimo informed. Stalin said “I believe you”.

[TNA, CAB/121/655]

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1. See also the report from the Tehran embassy No. 1480 to the Foreign Office relaying the concerns of the Iranian Prime Minister over Soviet influence in the north of the country, dated 26 December 1945 in CAB 121/655. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)