Telegram from Chargé d’Affaires of the United Kingdom in the USSR, F. Roberts, to the Foreign Office, London, 20 March 1946[[1]](#footnote-1)

FROM MOSCOW TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

MR. ROBERTS.

No. 1090.

20th March, 1946

IMPORTANT.

DSDIP.

TOP SECRET.

Your telegrams Nos. 759, 760, 761 AND 762.

[1.] I agree generally with conclusions of JIC paper, which strikes me as very well-balanced[[2]](#footnote-2). Apart from attempt in my three following telegrams to answer your specific questions and from comments on a few points in paper, my main general criticism is that I may be misleading in dealing with the Soviet Union to attempt to distinguish between offensive and defensive moves and between long-term and short-term aims. The Soviet State whose policy is determined by a mixture of Marxist-Leninist ideology (the importance of this is perhaps underestimated in the paper) and Russian national traditions, does not plan its political moves step by step as Germany did. She has interests everywhere and plans for most eventualities but her policies are entirely flexible and can be pressed, adapted or temporarily shelved to suit the needs of the moment, upon which she concentrates to the temporary exclusion of other projects. In the long run she thinks that she is bound to win out and can afford to be patient, provided always that she can defend herself against what she regards as a potentially hostile world.

2. Conclusions in paragraph 7 of your telegram 760 that Russia will try to avoid a major war until completion of five-year plan at end of 1960 seems a safe estimate for planning, on assumptions (A) that we and the United States retain sufficient strength meanwhile to discourage any adventures and (B) international situation does not further deteriorate to the point of persuading the Soviet Government that if they do not act now they may later have to defend themselves against a stronger and aggressive coalition. (B) however seems unlikely, Stalin himself has stated that Russia requires three or more five-year plans to overtake U.S.A. and Voznesenski introducing a new five-year plan on March 15th only set the goal for 1950 at 150 percent of total production in 1940. Even 1940 production, which was not particularly high and was not enough to enable the Soviet Union to withstand German onslaught unaided, would not be reached before 1948. It is, however, probable, in view of re-equipment of armed forces, slowness of reconversion of war factories and new preparation for production of atomic bomb, that armaments account for a higher proportion of total production now than in 1940. Voznesenski, however, confirmed many serious bottlenecks e.g. transport, construction, machine tools, labour morale and productivity and oil production, which in 1950 would only be about 14 percent more than in 1940. He gave no figures for present production.

3. I have attempted to cover the present Soviet world outlook and policy and its bearing upon Anglo-Soviet relations in my despatches Nos. 189 and 190 which left by bag on March 19th[[3]](#footnote-3). I suggested in conclusion that we should be wise to base our assessment on the following five main assumptions: -

(1) that the Soviet regime is dynamic and that the Soviet Union is still expanding though admittedly not as yet beyond areas where Russian interests existed before the revolution;

(2) that her long-term ambitions are dangerous to vital Britain Interests as we now see them;

(3) that security is the first consideration with the Soviet Union and that she will not endanger the realisation of her-long term projects by pressing immediate issues to the point of serious conflict, except as the result of a miscalculation of forces;

(4) that it is therefore possible though difficult to reconcile British and Soviet interests in any problem with which we are likely to be faced, granted the right mixture of strength and patience and the avoidance of sabre-rattling or the raising of prestige issues, but

(5) that, except in the now unlikely event of Germany or some other power again becoming a deadly menace to British and Russian survival, there is no longer in the new international situation any certainty of Britain and Russia being automatically drawn together in major international crises, as we were in 1812, 1914 and 1941.

4. Service Attaches have seen and agree generally with these telegrams. [[4]](#footnote-4)

[TNA, FO 371/56831]

Keywords: post-war USSR, inter-allied relations

1. This dispatch from Frank Roberts, the Charge d’Affaires at the British Embassy in Moscow, was one part of a series of papers analysing Soviet policies, which in several instances responded to Foreign Office inquiries. Together they represent the British analogue of the more famous “long telegram” of Roberts’s contemporary the American Charge d’Affaires George F. Kennan. See Sean Greenwood ‘Frank Roberts and the 'Other' Long Telegram: The View from the British Embassy in Moscow, March 1946’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan. 1990), pp. 103-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the report of the Joint Intelligence Committee of 1 March 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. They are published in: DBPO. Ser. 1. Vol. 1. p. 315 – 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also the record dated 24 March 1946 by the Foreign Office official Thomas Brimelow with a commentary to Roberts’s telegram. Brimelow concluded from Roberts’s telegram that, if unchecked, the Soviet advance will force Britain to lose one position after another. He approvingly quotes Roberts’s comparison of the gradual Soviet advance with the leaf by leaf approach to eating an artichoke. He advises utilising this gradual Soviet advance to educate the Anglo-American public of the nature of Soviet strategy, before suggesting that: ‘There is, I think, no chance of us seizing the initiative unless we are prepared to back some political doctrine as an alternative to Communism.’ (TNA, FO 371/56831/N3777). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)