From the Diary of Soviet Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Ya.A. Malik:record of the conversation with a Member of Parliament from the Conservative Party, Colonel Soames[[1]](#footnote-1), dated 21 August 1953

USSR EMBASSY

IN GREAT BRITAIN

No. 350

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

With the member of the British Parliament from the Conservative Party Colonel Soames

On 11 August, I had breakfast with the Member of Parliament from the Conservative Party, Soames, whom I had met at lunch with the Member of Parliament, Amery[[2]](#footnote-2).

Soames is married to Churchill’s daughter and occupies the post of Churchill’s Parliamentary Secretary.

The following deserves attention from my conversation with Soames.

1. Soames spoke with great concern about the need to seek ways of resolving contentious international problems and expressed regret that Churchill’s suggestion for the convening the meeting of Heads of the great powers had been declined by Eisenhower.

Soames particularly underlined the need for the resolution of controversial international issues with Churchill’s participation, as long as he was still alive. Nobody among the Western political leaders except for Churchill, said Soames, could make independently brave decisions, which went against the routinely accepted political course. Only he could make such decisions without looking around. Soames repeated many times that Churchill was old and did not have many years left to live, and therefore it was necessary to act immediately, before it was too late.

Later, Soames enquired, as if in passing, whether G.M. Malenkov had been to Berlin.

In our conversation, Soames lamented that Eisenhower declined Churchill’s proposal for the convening of a meeting between the great powers at the highest level, concretely between heads of state, while G. M. Malenkov did not voice his attitude towards the proposal.

Later Soames proclaimed that the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union G. M. Malenkov could have instructed the Soviet ambassador in London to pay a personal visit to Churchill at his countryside residence and to invite him for a meeting, for example in Berlin, without any prior preparation and agenda, simply for a conversation aimed for the two to get acquainted and to share opinions.

Soames claimed that Churchill would surely have accepted such an invitation from G.M. Malenkov. Churchill believed that to find ways of resolving contentious issues, heads of state should meet for conversations at breakfast or lunch, where they could share opinions informally. Such a gesture, declared Soames, could promote the extension of mutual understanding.

Soames later said that Churchill often, and with great excitement, remembered his meetings and informal, honest conversations with I.V. Stalin.

Responding to my remark that the outcome of the Washington meeting among the three Foreign Ministers had hardly contributed to that. Soames began arguing that a meeting between G. M. Malenkov and Churchill would have been useful for them getting to know each other, and that even if one could not expect any significant results from such a meeting, the very fact that the meeting took place, the there is a conversation and the sharing of opinions would have represented a significant step towards mutual understanding. I know, continued Soames, that the representatives of the Soviet Union believe that Churchill cannot do anything without the Americans, without Eisenhower, but a meeting between Churchill and G.M. Malenkov would dispell such mistaken assumptions.

Soames stated that Churchill still firmly backed the suggestion he had made in Parliament on 11 May. He would not back down on a single word or letter of his proposal. Churchill did everything to make Eisenhower agree to the meeting of the four great powers. This was Salisbury’s task at the Washington Conference. Bidault also supported Churchill's proposal in the name of France. Eisenhower and Dulles, however, objected to this proposal, explaining that the time had not yet come for the meeting of the Big Four heads of governments. The maximum that could be achieved was the proposal to convene the meeting between Foreign Ministers of the Big Four. Churchill did everything he could when he suggested that a meeting of Heads of governments be convened. If, in response, G.M. Malenkov had proposed a meeting with Churchill with the intention of getting to know each other and for the informal exchange of opinions, then such a meeting would have been useful. A meeting could take place in Berlin, Soames again repeated. It would not be mentioned in the press.

I made a remark that Churchill did not actively insist on his proposal for the convenening of a meeting of the great powers at the highest level. As was evident from the outcome of the Washington conference, Soames remarked that Churchill was still firmly committed to his proposal and that it was only Churchill’s illness and the stubborn resistance from Eisenhower that had prevented him from realising the idea.

Responding to my remark that Churchill’s illness could still be an obstacle, Soames replied that Churchill was strong enough to make a trip to Berlin.

Later in the course of our conversation, Soames declared: “Believe me, if I did not know that Churchill would certainly agree to such a proposal from G.M. Malenkov, then I would not speak to you about it.” He repeated this phrase twice.

I did not make any promises from my side.

Soames did not respond to my remark that the Washington meeting of the three Western Foreign Ministers had changed the situation for the worse.

As Soames was leaving, he asked me to think about his proposal for the unofficial meeting between G.M Malenkov and Churchill in Berlin.

2. Regarding the response of the three Great Powers to the communiqué of the Soviet government, Soames said that the response was being prepared and that Churchill was personally dealing with that question. Churchill was disappointed but not disheartened by the Soviet answer and considered it necessary to convene the meeting at least at the level of Foreign Ministers. That would contribute to relaxation of international tensions and would create opportunities for the sharing of opinions and the finding of ways towards the regulation of contentious issues. However, he did not retreat from his main line about the meeting of heads of government.

3. When we touched upon the Korean question and the forthcoming discussion of the issue at the session of the General Assembly and the political conference, Soames declared that the UK wished to resolve the Korean question and other Far Eastern problems. Soames underlined that the UK did not approve of separatist actions undertaken by the US government and by Dulles personally, expressed in the conclusion of the military agreement with Yi Seung-man.

Soames also contended, in vague terms, that the declaration of the sixteen nations had no importance, that it had been drafted a long time ago and that its aim was to contain China against resumption and escalation of war in Korea[[3]](#footnote-3).

He declared that Britain, before making a decision in case of a declaration of war, would carefully consider all sides of the matter and that the signing of “the declaration of the sixteen”[[4]](#footnote-4) did not mean that Britain would automatically accept what the Americans or Yi Seung-man would say on the Korean question.

Soames characterised the USA as a young country, that had followed the policy of isolationism for almost all of its short existence and had only recently entered the realm of international relations, and that American politicians did not understand many aspects of international problems. He again underlined that there was a huge difference between such an experienced political leader as Churchill and a newcomer to politics, such as Eisenhower, who has been a simple provincial American army colonel at the beginning of the war and who, with Churchill’s help, had achieved exceptional career to become the President of the USA, the most powerful country in the world. He said Eisenhower neither had political experience nor an understanding of international problems.

Regarding the situation inside the Labour Party, Soames said that there was no unity within the party; a sharp internal struggle was taking place between Attlee-Morrison’s faction and the “leftists”, headed by Bevin[[5]](#footnote-5). He also said that the members of the Labour Party are doing everything to act as defenders of Churchill’s ideas to divide Churchill from the rest of the Conservative Party and to exploit the illness of the Conservative leaders – Eden and Churchill – for their political goals.

4. Soames generally agreed with my remark that there was no difference between the foreign policies of the Labour and the Conservative governments and that the Labour government acted more like the Tories than the Tories themselves in foreign affairs. However, he characterised the Labour government as weak. For example, he referred to the fact that under the Labour government Britain suffered a large defeat in Iran[[6]](#footnote-6), and its weakness prevented it from taking decisive measures. In contrast, the Conservative government undertook decisive measures in Egypt, up to the point of using force. Soames argued that if the Conservatives had been in power at the beginning of the Iranian crisis, Churchill would not have been deterred from taking decisive measures.

5. Regarding France and its role in international affairs, Soames was rather sceptical as he explained: “So, what is France? Nothing. There are two main forces - the Soviet Union and the USA. Britain is still quite powerful, but it is not as powerful as it was 100 years ago. However it desires to act as a serious bridge between the USSR and the USA for the improvement of relations, for the regulation of contentious international questions and for the relaxation of international tension. ‘Bridges, not barriers,’ this is Churchill’s slogan, which he still firmly supports.”

USSSR AMBASSADOR TO GREAT BRITAIN Ya.A. MALIK

[FPARF, f. 6, inv. 12a, fold. 2127, file 47, pp. 79-84.]

Keywords: Post-war order, Post-war Asia, United Nations, Korea, great – power relations

1. Soames, Arthur Christopher John (1920–1987) – Baron Soames, Conservative Member of the House of Commons (1950–1956), son-in-law of W. Churchill. He held a series of high offices in Great Britain following the death of W. Churchill, including Secretary of State for War (1958–1960), Minister of Agriculture (1960–1964), Ambassador to France (1968–1972), Governor of Southern Rhodesia (1979–1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Amery, Harold Julian (1919–1996) – Baron Amery of Lustleigh, British political figure, Conservative Member of Parliament (1950–1966; 1969-1992) He held a range of State offices in the 1960s and early 1970s. He was married to the daughter of the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A mutual defence treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea was signed on 1 October 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The 16 Nations Declaration on the ceasefire – the declaration of the 16 member states of the UN that had sent troops to Korea under the flag of the armed forces of the UN to take part in the Korean War. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The reference is to the internal schism in the Labour Party that was characterised by a struggle for the leadership between “Bevanites”, the group of Labour left-wingers led by Aneurin Bevan, and the official party leadership on the right wing, Clement Attlee (Prime Minister in 1945–1951) and Herbert Morrison (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Attlee’s Cabinet). The schism surfaced in 1951 when A. Bevan (Minister of Labour) and H. Wilson (President of the Board of Trade) demonstratively resigned in protest at the taxation policies of Attlee’s Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This refers to the successful nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s assets in March 1951 by Mohammad Mosaddegh’s government. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)