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August 3, 1944
Conversation between Stanislaw Mikolajczyk and Stalin

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Summary:

The Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile meets with Stalin to discuss Polish-Soviet political and military relations.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

I finally saw Stalin at 9:30 P.M., August 3, 1944, in his Kremlin office.

The man who professedly wins elections by a 99 per cent vote is nonetheless the most heavily guarded individual on earth today. My visit had the full endorsement of the respective heads of the British and American governments, but my papers were scrutinized and rescrutinized at the main gate of the Kremlin. NKVD men led me through the yard to the door of a certain building in the enclosure; other NKVD men took me to a waiting room; still others were present and stared at me suspiciously as I stood in that room. Then I was admitted to the Red leader's large study.

Stalin was standing near a conference table that reached along one wall of the room. With him was his pale, nervous, young translator, Pavlov. Stalin wore his marshal's uniform, adorned by one single decoration. On the wall above him, curiously enough, were large oil paintings of two old czarist generals-Kutuzov and Suvorov. Relegated to an obscure spot near the door was a small photograph of Lenin.

"Won't you sit down?" Stalin asked. He took a place near the end of the conference table, his back against the wall. I sat opposite him, with Pavlov at the head of the long table and separating us. Stalin lighted a cigarette, exhaled the smoke, and made a gesture for me to begin.

"I'm glad to be here in Moscow on the anniversary of the Stalin-Sikorski agreement of 1941," I began, reminding him of a pact of friendship and aid that he had callously broken whenever it served his purposes.

"It is good also to be here at a time when the Soviet armies are defeating the Germans on Polish soil," I continued. "I'd like to discuss the Polish- Soviet relations, the collaboration to finish the fight against Germany, and the question of the future administration of Poland.

"But above all, since the fight within Warsaw has started, I want to appeal to you to bring immediate aid to our men in their pitifully unequal battles with the Germans."

Stalin looked back at me and answered:

"But you're not taking into consideration the agreement that has been reached between the Soviet Union and the Lublin Committee." It was the last time I was to hear him use the word "Committee" in connection with that group. Thereafter he referred to it as "The Polish Government."

"You are speaking of something that has been done since I left London for Moscow, you know," I said.

He did not reply directly. Stalin seldom does. He can listen with considerable patience, even though his mind has long since been made up, but having heard his visitor, he moves on to another topic as if the first topic had never been mentioned. So now he said:

"The trouble with the Polish underground army is that it does not want to fight the Germans."

"You've been grossly misinformed!" I almost shouted. "Our Home Army began fighting Germans in 1939 and has never stopped fighting them." I reminded him of Sikorski's efforts in 1941-1943 to enlist his aid for that fighting and of Stalin's reply that, while he was "sorry to see Polish blood shed," it was too early to give help to our underground.

I reminded him, too, that there was a clear-cut record of our years of sabotaging German troop and supply trains moving across Poland to the Russian front, and of Russian communiqués telling of the aid given by the Polish underground in capturing of countless places in eastern Poland.

"Ah, yes, but what an army!" Stalin snorted. "It has neither tanks nor artillery."

"But that's one of the reasons I'm here to see you," I insisted. "Can you supply our men with tanks and artillery? Your forces are in the very suburbs of Warsaw and are near Home Army units in many other sections of Poland."

"I cannot trust the Poles," Stalin answered evenly. "They suspect me of wanting to occupy Poland again. They're making a lot of trouble for me."

I asked him to name an example.

"Well," he said after a bit of pondering, "there was the case of the commandant of your Home Army forces in the Chelm area. As we neared that region, he mobilized all able-bodied men from sixteen to sixty-five and joined in the fight!"

He stopped, as if I should understand his indignation, but I had to ask him what was wrong with such action.

"He should not have done this," Stalin replied. "We needed those men for the harvest. So I had to order the arrest of that commandant."

Startled at his reasoning, I launched into a defense of the patriotism and cooperation of the Polish people in face of their extreme hardships and dangers, but he cut me short this time.

"The Poles are a different people today than when you left there in 1939," he said. "New forces have arisen, new authorities have taken over in the past five years. Everything has changed." Before I could reply, he moved the talk along to the touchy matter of our frontiers.

"You must realize this," he said, "that nothing can be done for Poland if you do not recognize the Curzon line. For the loss of eastern Poland you'll get the Oder line in the west, including Wroclaw, Stettin, and East Prussia. Konigsberg (I thought instantly of Roosevelt's assurances) will remain with the Soviet Union, as will the area around it."

I protested that this was a direct violation of the Atlantic Charter, whose principles the USSR had accepted, and of existing Polish-Soviet pacts. After hearing me out, Stalin shrugged and said:

"Maybe we can make some changes in the Curzon line that will be of benefit to Poland. But first you must reach an agreement with the Lublin Poles. Hereafter I intend to deal with only one Polish government, not two."

Professor Grabski, who had accompanied me to the meeting, reacted immediately.

He moved close to Stalin and almost forcibly took Pavlov's place at the end of the table. This fine old Polish patriot began to beat on Stalin's table. He spoke for forty-five minutes in Russian about the criminal injustices that were being heaped on Poland.

Stalin listened to him thoughtfully, and when Grabski finished, winded, Stalin got up and patted the indignant old gentleman on the back and laughed, "You're a good agitator."

Then he reminisced about Warsaw, especially the picturesque old portion of the capital. He said: "We hoped to take Warsaw on August 5 or 6, but the Germans were defending it more savagely than we had expected. There would be a small delay in capturing the city."

"I'm eager to help your Home Army there," he went on. "But how can I? I don't know how to communicate with your commanders. I'd like to drop two of my communications officers in there to send me word about the situation."

I offered him every assistance and urged him to do this. He wandered along in his speech, however, returning to the general subject of Poland and reiterating his old pledges for a "strong, independent, and democratic" Polish nation. He talked for a long time, but it was extremely clear just what kind of Poland he wanted after the war. In view of what both he and everybody else already knew about Anglo-American appeasement and indifference, it was also apparent what he would get. Above all, I could see as he talked that he was determined that all Polish resistance, as exemplified by the Polish Home Army, would perish.