

October 09, 1944
Record of Meeting at the Kremlin, Moscow, 9 October 1944, at 10 p.m.

Citation:

“Record of Meeting at the Kremlin, Moscow, 9 October 1944, at 10 p.m.,” October 09, 1944, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Public Record Office
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Summary:

Churchill, Eden, Stalin, and Molotov discuss the leadership in Poland, Britains interests in Greece and Hong Kong, the actions of Romania and Bulgaria during the war, Turkey, the need for the Great Powers to exert influence on the Balkans to prevent small wars, the leadership of Italy, interests in Bulgaria and Romania, the dividing of Germany and Germany's future, and the American plans in the war against Japan.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

- English Transcription

RECORD OF MEETING AT THE KREMLIN, MOSCOW,

9th OCTOBER, 1944, AT 10 p.m.

Present:

The Prime Minister. Marshal Stalin.

The Secretary of State. M. Molotov.

Sir A. Clark Kerr. M. Pavlov.

Mr. A Birse.

THE PRIME MINISTER gave Marshal Stalin a signed photograph of himself in return for the one sent him some weeks ago by the Marshal.

THE PRIME MINISTER hoped they might clear away many questions about which they had been writing to each other for a long time. As time had passed many things had arisen, but they were out of all proportion to the greatness of the common struggle. By talking to each other he and Stalin could avoid innumerable telegrams and letters - and they could give the Ambassador a holiday.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that he was ready to discuss anything.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested beginning with the most tiresome question - Poland. He said that they should have a common policy in regard to Poland. At present each had a game cock in his hand.

MARSHAL STALIN said (with a laugh) that it was difficult to do without cocks. They gave the morning signal.

THE PRIME MINISTER remarked that the question of the frontier was settled as agreed. He would like presently to check up on the frontier with a map.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that if the frontier was agreed on the Curzon Line it would help their discussion.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he wanted to explain what was in his and the Secretary of State's mind as they understood the situation. The time would come when they would meet at the armistice table, and that might also be the peace table. The Americans would find it easier to settle at an armistice table, because there the President could decide, whereas at a peace table the Senate would have to be consulted. At the armistice table the Prime Minister would support the frontier line as fixed at Tehran and he thought it likely that the United States would do the same. That decision had been endorsed by the British War Cabinet, and he felt it would be approved by his country. He would say it was right, fair and necessary for the safety and future of Russia. If some General Sosnkowski objected it would not matter, because Britain and United States thought it right and fair. He and Mr. Eden had for months been trying to get Sosnkowski sacked. He had now been sacked and as for General Bor, the Germans were looking after him.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that the Poles were now without a Commander-in-Chief.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that some colourless man had been left. He could not remember his name. The Prime Minister went on to ask Marshal Stalin a question. Would he think it worth while to bring Mikolajczyk and Romer to Moscow? He had them tied up in an aircraft and it would only take 36 hours to Moscow.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether they had the authority to settle questions with the Polish Committee for National Liberation.

THE PRIME MINISTER was not sure, but he thought they would not be anxious to go to bed with the Committee. If, however, they were in Moscow they could, with British and Russian agreement, be forced to settle.

MARSHAL STALIN had no objection to making another attempt, but Mikolajczyk would have to make contact with the Committee. The latter now had an army at its disposal and represented a force.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that the other side also thought they had an army, and part of which had held out in Warsaw. They also had a brave army corps in Italy, where they lost seven or eight thousand men. Then there was the armoured division, one brigade of which was in France. A Polish division which had gone to Switzerland when France fell was coming out in dribbles. They were well equipped and they had many friends in England. They were good and brave men. The difficulty about the Poles was that they had unwise political leaders. Where there were two Poles there was one quarrel.

MARSHAL STALIN added that where there was one Pole he would begin to quarrel with himself through sheer boredom.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that Marshal Stalin and he himself as well as M. Molotov and Mr. Eden between them had more chance of bringing the Poles together. The British would bring pressure to bear on their Poles, while the Poles in the East were already in agreement with the Soviet Government.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed to try.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked if there was any objection to M. Grabski's coming to Moscow.

MARSHAL STALIN had no objection.

THE PRIME MINISTER then referred to the armistice terms for the satellites who had been coerced by Germany and had not distinguished themselves in the war. If Marshal Stalin agreed, the Prime Minister thought that M. Molotov or Mr. Eden might discuss these 29 terms. The terms for Hungary were important. He hoped the Russians would soon be in Budapest.

MARSHAL STALIN said it was possible.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that there were two countries in which the British had particular interest one was Greece. He was not worrying much about Roumania. That was very much a Russian affair and the treaty the Soviet Government had proposed was reasonable and showed much statecraft in the interests of general peace in the future. But in Greece it was different. Britain must be the leading Mediterranean Power and he hoped Marshal Stalin would let him have the first say about Greece in the same way as Marshal Stalin about Roumania. Of course, the British Government would keep in touch with the Soviet Government.

MARSHAL STALIN understood that Britain had suffered very much owing to her communications in the Mediterranean having been cut by the Germans. It was a serious matter for Britain when the Mediterranean route was not in her hands. In that respect Greece was very important. He agreed with the Prime Minister that Britain should have the first say in Greece.

THE PRIME MINISTER said it was better to express these things in diplomatic terms and not to use the phrase "dividing into spheres," because the Americans might be shocked. But as

long as he and Marshal understood each other he could explain matters to the President.

MARSHAL STALIN interrupted to say that he had received a message from President Roosevelt. The President wanted Mr. Harriman to attend their talks as an observer and that the decisions reached between them should be of a preliminary nature.

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed. He had told the President - he and the President had no secrets - that he would welcome Mr. Harriman to a good number of their talks, but he did not want this to prevent intimate talk between Marshal Stalin and himself. He would keep the President informed. Mr. Harriman might come in for any formal talks as an observer. Mr. Harriman was not quite in the same position as they were.

MARSHAL STALIN said he had only sent a reply to the effect that he did not know what questions would be discussed, but as soon as he did know he would tell the President. He had noticed some signs of alarm in the President's message about their talks and on the whole did not like the message. It seemed to demand too many rights for the United States leaving too little for the Soviet Union and Great Britain, who, after all, had a treaty of common assistance.

MARSHAL STALIN went on to say that he had no objection to Mr. Harriman's attending the formal talks.

THE PRIME MINISTER referred to the Conference at Dumbarton Oaks. The President had not wanted this to be discussed in Moscow but only when the three heads got together. The President had not said so, but he must have had in mind the coming election. The President would be more free to talk in about a month's time. It was fair to say that while at first His Majesty's Government had inclined to the American view they now saw a great deal of force in the other point of view. Supposing China asked Britain to give up Hong Kong, China and Britain would have to leave the room while Russia and the United States settled the question. Or, if the Argentine and the United States had a quarrel they would object if England, China and Russia had to settle it. The Prime Minister pointed out that all this was off the record. The wise thing was not to refer in Moscow to this question, but to wait until the meeting of the three heads, when it could be settled.

THE PRIME MINISTER then raised the question of the interests of the two governments in the various Balkan countries and the need to work in harmony in each of them. After some discussion it was agreed that as regards Hungary and Yugoslavia each of the two Governments was equally interested, that Russia had a major interest in Roumania and that Britain was in the same position with regard to Greece. The Prime Minister suggested that where Bulgaria was concerned the British interest was greater than it was in Roumania. This led to some discussion about the crimes committed by Bulgaria.

MARSHAL STALIN recalled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, where the Bulgarians had been on the German side and three divisions had fought against the Russians in the last war.

THE PRIME MINISTER declared that Bulgaria owed more to Russia than to any other country. He said that in Roumania Britain had been a spectator. In Bulgaria she had to be a little more than a spectator.

M. MOLOTOV asked whether the Turkish question related to this matter.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that he had not touched upon Turkey. He was only saying what was in his mind. He was glad to see how near it was to the Russian mind.

M. MOLOTOV remarked that the Convention of Montreux still remained.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that was a Turkish question and not a Bulgarian.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that Turkey was also a Balkan country. According to the Convention of Montreux Japan had as much right as Russia. Everything had been adjusted to the League of Nations and the League of Nations no longer existed. If Turkey were threatened she could close the Straits and Turkey herself had to decide when she was faced with a real threat. All the paragraphs in the Montreux Convention were controlled by Turkey. This was an anachronism. Marshal Stalin had put this question in Tehran and the Prime Minister had expressed his sympathy. Now that they were discussing the Balkan question and Turkey was a Balkan country, did the Prime Minister think it appropriate to discuss it?

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed.

MARSHAL STALIN pointed out that if Britain were interested in the Mediterranean then Russia was equally interested in the Black Sea.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that Turkey had missed her chance after the Tehran conference. The reason she was frightened was because she had no modern weapons, she thought she had a good army, whereas nowadays an army was not everything. Turkey was not clever.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that Turkey had 26 divisions in Thrace and asked against whom they were directed.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied they were directed against Bulgaria, because Bulgaria was armed with French weapons taken by the Germans. The Prime Minister went on to say that, taking a long view of the future of the world it was no part of British policy to grudge Soviet Russia access to warm-water ports and to the great oceans and seas of the world. On the contrary, it was part of their friendship to help the Soviet Union. They no longer followed the policy of Disraeli or Lord Curzon. They were not going to stop Russia. They wished to help. What did Marshal Stalin think about the kind of changes required in the Montreux Convention?

MARSHAL STALIN could not say what point required amendment, but he felt the convention was unsuitable in present circumstances and the spearhead was directed against Russia. It should be dropped. If the Prime Minister agreed in principle with that point of view it might be possible to discuss the required changes. It was quite impossible for Russia to remain subject to Turkey, who could close the Straits and hamper Russian imports and exports and even her defences. What would Britain do if Spain or Egypt were given this right to close the Suez Canal, or what would the United States Government say if some South American Republic had the right to close the Panama Canal? Russia was in a worse situation. Marshal Stalin did not want to restrict Turkey's sovereignty. But at the same time he did not want Turkey to abuse her sovereignty and to grip Russian trade by the throat.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that in principle he shared that point of view. He suggested that the Russians should let us know in due course what was required. Otherwise Turkey might be frightened that Istanbul was to be taken. When the three heads met later on there would not be the same difficulty. He was in favour of Russia's having free access to the Mediterranean for her merchant ships and ships of war. Britain hoped to work in a friendly way with the Soviet Union, but wanted to bring Turkey along by gentle steps, not to frighten her.

MARSHAL STALIN said he understood.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that, if they were sitting at the armistice table and Marshal Stalin asked him for free passage through the Straits for merchant ships and warships, he personally would say that Britain had no objection. Britain had no ties with Turkey except the Montreux Convention, which was inadmissible to-day and obsolete.

MARSHAL STALIN said he did not want to hurry the Prime Minister, but only to point out

that the question existed in their minds and he was anxious that it should be admitted that their claim was justified.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought Marshal Stalin should take the initiative and tell the United States what was in his mind. The Prime Minister thought Russia had a right and moral claim. Looking at the Balkans he thought they should do something to prevent the risk of civil war between the political ideologies in those countries. They could not allow a lot of little wars after the Great World War. They should be stopped by the authority of the three Great Powers.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he wanted to talk about Kings. In no case would Britain try to force a King on Italy, Greece or Yugoslavia. At the same time the people ought to be left to decide matters by a free plebiscite in time of tranquillity. They could then say whether they wanted a republic or a monarchy. The people should have a fair chance of freedom of expression. Northern Italy was in the power of the Anglo-American armies. Britain did not care for the Italian King, but above all they did not want civil war after the troops had been withdrawn or before their withdrawal. Britain would like the Soviet Union to soft-pedal the Communists in Italy and not to stir them up. Pure democracy would settle what the people wanted, but he did not want to have disturbances in Turin or Milan and clashes between the troops and the people. The Italians were in a miserable condition. He did not think much of them as a people, but they had a good many votes in New York State. This was off the record.

The Prime Minister went on to say that he did not want to have trouble in Italy before the United States left it. The President was their best friend. They would never have such a good one. That was why he petted the Italians, though he did not like them much. He had not meant that the Soviet Union should influence the Communist vote in New York. He was referring to the Communists in Italy.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that it was difficult to influence Italian Communists. The position of Communists differed in different countries. It depended upon their national situation. If Ercoli were in Moscow Marshal Stalin might influence him. But he was in Italy, where the circumstances were different. He could send Marshal Stalin to the devil. Ercoli could say he was an Italian and tell Marshal Stalin to mind his own business. When the Red Army entered Bulgaria, Bulgarian Communists proceeded to form Soviets. The Red Army stopped it. The Communists arrested the Bulgarian police and the Red Army freed the police. However, Ercoli was a wise man, not an extremist, and would not start an adventure in Italy.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he was only asking that they should not be stirred up.

MARSHAL STALIN expressed his fear that the Communists would send him to the devil. As regards the King, Ercoli had his own views. He had said he would collaborate with the King if the King stood by the people. Ercoli had referred to Germany, where there was no King, but where there was a man who was worse than the greatest despot.

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed. He then said that he had been talking the whole time and that it was now Marshal Stalin's turn.

MARSHAL STALIN reverted to the Balkans and suggested that our interest in Bulgaria was not, in fact, as great as the Prime Minister had claimed.

MR. EDEN remarked that Britain wanted more in Bulgaria than in Roumania.

MARSHAL STALIN claimed that Bulgaria was a Black Sea country. Was Britain afraid of anything? Was she afraid of a Soviet campaign against Turkey? The Soviet Union had no such intention.

MR. EDEN said Britain was not afraid of anything.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether the Prime Minister thought Bulgaria was being punished less than she deserved. Bulgaria should be punished for her two wars on the side of Germany.

MR. EDEN reminded Marshal Stalin that Britain had been at war with Bulgaria for three years and wanted a small share in the control of that country after Germany's defeat.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that M. Molotov and Mr. Eden should go into details. This was agreed.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that in the presence of Mr. Harriman they might have a talk about the future of Germany. He suggested that for about a month or so they should not say anything publicly because it would make the Germans fight harder. He had been shy of breathing fire and slaughter, but they might discuss it quietly among themselves.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he was all for hard terms. Opinions were divided in the United States. The best thing would be to beat the Germans into unconditional surrender and then tell them what to do. He wanted to hear Marshal Stalin's opinion about the regime to be applied and how Germany was to be divided, what was to be done with Prussia, the Saar and the Ruhr, and with German weapons. Russian factories had been destroyed as well as Belgian and Dutch and the machines taken away would have to be replaced. Perhaps the Foreign Secretaries could discuss this matter with M. Molotov and Mr. Harriman. The President was for hard terms. Others were for soft. The problem was how to prevent Germany getting on her feet in the lifetime of our grandchildren.

MARSHAL STALIN thought the Versailles peace was inadequate. It had not removed the possibility of revenge. Hard measures would stir a desire for revenge. The problem was to create such a peace that the possibility of revenge would be denied to Germany. Her heavy industry would have to be destroyed. The State would have to be split up. How that was to be done would have to be discussed. Her heavy industry would have to be reduced to a minimum.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested it should apply to the electrical and chemical industries also.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed that it should apply to all industry producing war material. Germany should be deprived of the possibility of revenge. Otherwise every twenty-five or thirty years there would be a new world war which would exterminate the young generation. If approached from that angle the harshest measures would prove to be the most humane. Eight to ten million Germans had been lost after every war. Reprisals in Germany might not affect only one and a half million Germans. As regards concrete proposals, Mr. Eden and M. Molotov should get together.

M. MOLOTOV asked what was the Prime Minister's opinion of the Morgenthau plan.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the President and Mr. Morgenthau were not very happy about its reception. The Prime Minister went on to say that as he had declared in Tehran, Britain would not agree to mass executions of Germans, because one day British public opinion would cry out. But it was necessary to kill as many as possible in the field. The others should be made to work to repair the damage done to other countries. They might use the Gestapo on such work and the Hitler Youth should be re-educated to learn that it was more difficult to build than to destroy.

MARSHAL STALIN thought that a long occupation of Germany would be necessary.

THE PRIME MINISTER did not think that the Americans would stay very long.

MARSHAL STALIN said France should provide some forces.

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed.

MARSHAL STALIN suggested the use of the small countries.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought United Poland could be employed.

MARSHAL STALIN said Silesia would go to the Poles and part of East Prussia. The Soviet Union would take Koenigsberg and the Poles would be very interested in the occupation of Germany.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought the population might be moved from Silesia and East Prussia to Germany. If seven million had been killed in the war there would be plenty of room for them. He suggested that M. Molotov and Mr. Eden, with Mr. Harriman, should talk this over and get a picture of the general proposals for Marshal Stalin and himself to think about, and thus when the end came they would not be without something unprobed. They should also decide what part the European Advisory Commission should play.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed.

THE PRIME MINISTER turned to the Anglo-American war against Japan. He pointed out that here again the utmost secrecy was required. He remarked how wonderfully well secrecy had been maintained considering the declaration made by Marshal Stalin at Tehran about Japan. The Prime Minister had asked the President to give a statement for use as an outline of the American plan for 1945 in the Pacific. Plans were moving quickly and the position was changing very much as island after island was taken, but the President had given Mr. Harriman and General Deane an outline of the plan which he (the Prime Minister) was to be shown and it was to be discussed with the Soviet Generals. He suggested that conversations should begin with Mr. Harriman and his General and that afterwards they might go away and talk separately, technically.

MARSHAL STALIN said that the Soviet military leaders had been informed of the existence of the President's plan and General Deane was to have had a talk with the Soviet High Command, but the latter were awaiting information from the Far East about Japanese strength. Marshal Stalin did not know details of the plan just as the Prime Minister did not know them, but he was prepared to acquaint himself with it. If they could all meet and examine the plan that would be better.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he thought that Mr. Harriman and General Deane had been authorised to tell Marshal Stalin in broad outline about the plan, but he thought it should be discussed with General Brooke, who was also a member of the Suvorov Order. General Brooke was going to take a ride in a tram as he was entitled to do, but he could not spare the time for a visit to the seaside. These were his privileges as a member of the Order of Suvorov. General Brooke was also ready to give an account of the operations in the West, in France and Italy and to tell how affairs stood. He would like Marshal Stalin to know that the British had as many divisions fighting against Germany in Italy and France as the United States and we had nearly as many as the United States fighting against Japan. Altogether 60 divisions of 40,000 men including a heavy backing of commissariat, artillery, &c.