

January 9, 1951

Stalin's Conference with East European Delegates

Citation:

"Stalin's Conference with East European Delegates", January 9, 1951, Wilson Center Digital Archive, C. Cristescu, "Ianuarie 1 95 1 : Stalin decide inannarea Romanei," Magazin Istoric, 1995, no. 1 0, pp. 1 5-23
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134390>

Summary:

Stalin and Ministers from Eastern European countries discuss the current military status in Eastern Europe, focusing specifically on potential moves by the United States. Topics also included a discussion on the strength of Eastern European armed forces

Original Language:

Romanian

Contents:

Translation - English

[A conference of the leaders of the so-called People's Democracies and the Soviet Union was held from 9 to 12 January 1951 in Moscow. According to the Romanian delegation's report, based on notes taken during the sessions, the conference was attended by: Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, Vasilevsky, Shtemenko (USSR); the First or General Secretaries of the Communist Parties and the respective Defense Ministers, as follows: Ochab, Rokossovski (Poland); Slansky, Cepicka (Czechoslovakia); Rakosi, Farkas (Hungary); Gheorghiu-Dej, Bodnaras (Romania); Cervenkov, Panchevski (Bulgaria). Also attending were the Soviet principal military attaches to four countries: Gusev (Czechoslovakia), Boiko (Hungary), Kolganov (Romania), and Yemeljanov (Bulgaria). The conference opened at 21:00 hours on Tuesday, 9 January in the Kremlin.]

Comrade Stalin opened the conference with the following remarks (rendition from notebook):

The opinion arose in recent times that the United States is an invincible power and is prepared to initiate a third world war. As it turns out, however, not only is the U.S. unprepared to initiate a third world war, but is unable even to cope with a small war such as the one in Korea.

It is obvious that the U.S. needs several more years for preparation. The U.S. is bogged down in Asia and will remain pinned down there for several years.

The fact that the U.S. will be tied down in Asia for the next two or three years constitutes a very favorable circumstance for us, for the world revolutionary movement. These two-to three years we must use skillfully.

The U.S. has atomic power; we have that too. The U.S. has a large navy; but their navy cannot play the decisive role in a war. The U.S. has a modern air force, but theirs is a weak air force, weaker than ours.

Our task consists of using the two-to-three years at our disposal in order to create a modern and powerful military force. This we are capable of doing, we have all the prerequisites for this. China has created a better army than those of the People's Democracies. It is abnormal that you should have weak armies. This situation must be turned around. You in the People's Democracies must, within two to three years, create modern and powerful armies that must be combat-ready by the end of the three-year period.

... The conference proceeded to designate comrade Molotov as its chairman. There followed the reports of the Defense Ministers of the People's Democracies, concerning the current preparedness of their armed forces, in the following order: [The rapporteurs listed: Rokossovski, Cepicka, Farkas, Bodnaras, Panchevski.] The presentation of the individual reports took 20 to 30 minutes on average. The reports led to the conclusion that none of the People's Democracies could meet the requirements of a war at the present time. While their preparedness level is practically identical, the countries have not coordinated their military organization and procurement plans.

All the reports, other than our own, confined themselves to describing the armed forces' organization and manpower, with their achievements and shortcomings; and included requests to the Soviet Union to upgrade the countries' military equipment. These reports failed to express resolve to do one's best for raising the military potential; and they made no reference at all to the need for coordination between the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies in terms of military organization, training, and procurement. Our report did contain these ideas.

... During the discussion on the reports, comrade Ochab dwelt on political considerations involved in developing the Polish army; and failed to discuss our specific proposal, even though Comrade Stalin had already (during the delivery of comrade Panchevski's report) expressed his view that [quote-unquote in the original] "the Romanian comrades' proposal is correct." Comrade Rakosi then requested the floor to support our proposal fully.

The other delegates did not get to speak after that because Comrade Stalin proceeded to conclude the session.

Comrade Stalin (rendition from notebook): We must speed up assistance to the comrades from the People's Democracies. We must deliver technical blueprints to them faster. We have made that decision already and I don't understand why it is not being implemented.

We must give the People's Democracies two radars per country, of the type that we currently possess, of 200 kilometer range, so that they learn to use it and to identify approaching enemy aircraft. Later it will be necessary to give them the new radars that we are now working on, of 400 kilometer range .. . A six-year plan such as that of the Poles is no good. What kind of a plan is this. for six years ? Who can guarantee six years for you ? Two to three years, that's the way to plan, that will do.

We must organize armies in the People's Democracies that would, in case of war, field 2 million to 2.5 million men from the first alert. We must carefully plan to equip this force well, with everything it needs. What do you say, Vasilevsky ? Is 2 million, 2.5 million adequate ?

Comrade Vasilevsky, supported by comrade Shtemenko: No. the People's Democracies can easily provide 4 million.

Comrade Stalin: If they provide 4 million, those will be poorly equipped. Preferably 3 million, to be available on first alert, well organized and equipped. That should be adequate. 3 million.

The Romanian comrades' proposal is correct. I consider that the Romanian comrades' proposal should be accepted and that the commission envisaged in that proposal should be entrusted with the task of equipping the forces. The commission, or whatever its name will be, should provide the forces with modern combat equipment in the appropriate amounts; so that everything be ready by the end of the three-year period.

We must provide jet fighter aircraft, at least one division per country ... The most difficult problem to solve is that of ammunition, as our war experience shows. None of the People's Democracies can on its own provide everything it needs for war. Consequently they must help each other. That will be the role of the committee. Some raw materials ought to be replaced with other raw materials. For example, copper can be replaced with aluminum for many military items. Aluminum will do instead of copper, will do very well. We need lots of ammunition. An artillery piece, a rifle will last 5 to 10 years. But the weapons are useless without ammunition. We need a lot of bullets, shells, bombs, mines, etc.

No single country can be expected to produce everything. The tasks must be apportioned.

Not every country should produce tanks and artillery guns. Select two or three countries that can produce those things faster and better The airmen must be

reliable, carefully screened, so that they don't defect with their aircraft across the borders. Anyway the fighter jets are for defense, you need a bomber force for the offense, at least one bomber division per country in the first stage.

That committee must deal with the procurement of modern equipment. That's the kind of committee we need. I propose appointing here and now a drafting group which will present recommendations within two to three days.

In a brief discussion it was decided that all the delegates from the People's Democracies would join the drafting group under the chairmanship of comrade Vasilevsky .

... The drafting group conferred on Wednesday, 1 0 January and Thursday, 1 1 January at the General Staff of the Soviet Army ... The following peacetime and wartime manpower levels were set for each of the People's Democracies:

Poland: 350,000 in peacetime, 900,000 in wartime;
Czechoslovakia: 250,000 in peacetime, 700,000 in wartime;
Hungary: 1 50,000 in peacetime, 350,000 in wartime;
Romania: 250,000 in peacetime, 700,000 in wartime;
Bulgaria: 1 40,000 in peacetime, 350,000 in wartime;
Totals: 1 ,140,000 in peacetime, 3,000,000 in wartime .

... During the meeting there arose a dispute with Czechoslovakia's representatives Comrade Slansky proposed that the coordinating body be comprised of nonpermanent representatives. We, however, maintained--considering the coordinating body's important tasks and Comrade Stalin's advice on the top secret nature of the committee's work--that it must be a highly authoritative body, that its members must be permanent ones. They must be selected from among competent and highly reliable individuals; two representatives from each country, including one military representative...

Comrade Farkas requested the floor to state his disagreement with the Czech [sic] proposal and his agreement with our proposal. Comrade Rakosi in turn supported our proposal. Comrade Vasilevsky asked for a 24-hour time-out in order to work out specific suggestions.

The meeting on Thursday, 1 1 January, which convened at the same appointed time of 1 6:00 in the same place, began with Marshal Vasilevsky proposing changes in the wartime manpower levels of Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, reducing Romania's by 1 00,000 and raising Hungary's and Bulgaria's by 50,000 each. The proposal was accepted unanimously, so that the wartime manpower levels of these three countries are set at: Romania 600,000, Hungary 400,000, Bulgaria 400,000.

...As regards the coordinating committee, the Soviet Marshal relayed a proposal that the committee should deal with procurement only. The Romanian delegation's previously submitted proposal, regarding other aspects of the committee's activities, was cited in the Soviet considerations which were ultimately accepted unanimously. On Friday, 1 2 January at 1 6:00 hours, the protocol on cooperation among the six countries was adopted in the form approved by the drafting group.

At 22:00 hours that night the last plenary meeting was held... It proceeded to discuss the appointment of a permanent chairman of the coordinating committee. Comrade Vasilevsky nominated comrade Bulganin. Comrade Stalin and the representatives of the People's Democracies' unanimously agreed with that proposal.

Comrade Stalin took the floor to draw the conclusions (rendition from notebook): You allotted too few jet fighter airplanes to Bulgaria. You proceeded from the size of its population, instead of proceeding from strategic considerations. Bulgaria has many enemies along its borders: Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia. We must allot Bulgaria more jet fighter airplanes. I consider it necessary to allot Bulgaria two divisions, instead of the one division and one regiment that you allotted.

Let me remind you that the three years at our disposal are not for sleeping, but for arming, and arming well. Why is this necessary? This is necessary in view of the imperialists' way of thinking: they are in the habit of attacking unarmed or weakly armed countries in order to liquidate them, but they keep away from well-armed countries. This is why you need to arm during this respite, and arm well, in order that the imperialists respect you and keep away from you.

This meeting lasted a total of 16 minutes.