

March 3, 1944

Stalin and Harriman Discuss Poland

Citation:

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Summary:

Ambassador Harriman and Stalin discuss the "Polish Question".

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan
Transcript - English

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Marshal Stalin said that the Soviet Government had taken its position on the Polish question and could not recede therefrom.

The Ambassador said that he would be as short in his remarks as Marshal Stalin desired. Marshal Stalin observed that it was not a question of time. The Ambassador asked what we could do if the Prime Minister's suggestions did not prove acceptable. He said that the President was anxious to do anything he could to contribute to the solution of the Polish problem.

Marshal Stalin replied: "Isn't it clear? We stand for the Curzon Line." He said that the Poles now wished Wilno and Lwow. The Polish émigré government in London, he said, is not the same as the Polish people. The Government wants not only Lwow but Wilno. He said that the people in Poland are better than the Government in London and asked whether the Russians were taken for fools.

The Ambassador stated that he had understood that the Poles had ^{indicated a willingness to} accept the Curzon Line. Marshal Stalin replied that this was not true.

The Ambassador asked whether, for his information, Marshal Stalin could tell him what information he had regarding the attitude of the people in Poland toward the London Government. Marshal Stalin replied that in his opinion their attitude was negative.

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The Ambassador stated that he did not believe that the American Government had any information on this subject except such as was received through Polish sources and stated that it would be of interest to receive any information on this point which Marshal Stalin possessed. He explained that he meant the attitude of the Polish people toward the London Government as a group and especially their attitude toward Mikolajczyk and the Generals.

Marshal Stalin replied that he was certain of one thing -- that the Poles are welcoming the Red Army. He said that he had no interest in their attitude toward Mikolajczyk and other groups. If such information is available, he suggested that the Ambassador could obtain it from the Foreign Office.

The Ambassador said that the President desired that all Poles should unite in supporting the Red Army in the war against Germany and that he feared civil war might break out in Poland if a solution to the question was not found. Stalin replied: "War with whom? Between whom? Where?" The Ambassador replied that he meant civil war among the Poles themselves in Poland. Stalin said that there was no danger of this. He said that Mikolajczyk had no troops in Poland nor were there any armed forces of any size in that country.

The Ambassador asked about the size of the Polish underground forces. Stalin replied that he did not know

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but that he was sure they were not large. He remarked that there were "a few agents of the London Government" in Poland.

The Ambassador asked in what form Marshal Stalin envisaged an eventual solution of the Polish question. Marshal Stalin replied that while the Red Army is liberating Poland, Mikolajczyk will go on repeating his platitudes. By the time Poland is liberated, Mikolajczyk's Government will have changed or another Government will have emerged in Poland.

The Ambassador stated that there seemed to be complete agreement between the three Governments as to ~~what~~ ^{the} ~~ultimate objectives~~ ^{ultimate objectives} ~~was deemed desirable~~ for Poland and that each wished that the Polish people be given a chance freely to choose its own Government. It was a question of how to obtain this objective.

Marshal Stalin replied that he did not know how the objective was to be reached. He said that circumstances would be determining and that it was difficult at this stage to predict.

The Ambassador asked Marshal Stalin whether he felt there was any position in the matter which ^{he would want} the President ~~should~~ ^{to} take. Marshal Stalin replied that he had understood from his conversations with the President in Tehran that the President approved the Curzon Line as a basis for settlement. The Ambassador said that he referred to the political aspects of the question. When Stalin

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remarked that he did not understand, the Ambassador stated that the question at issue was not well understood in the United States. He pointed out that we have recognized the Polish Government and that we now consider it to be the Government of Poland. This creates dissatisfaction in the United States and the President is concerned about its effect on public opinion. The Ambassador asked whether Stalin felt that time could cure the situation or whether other steps, such as the reorganization of the Polish Government, should be undertaken.

Marshal Stalin remarked that he did not know whether Mr. Churchill would have any success. He said that so far as the ideas of the Soviet Government were concerned, they had been communicated to the Ambassador by Mr. Molotov. Molotov nodded assent. Stalin added that the President was conversant with the Soviet attitude and said that he had written to the President several times on this question.

The Ambassador said that the President feared that a Government formed on the basis of the Soviet proposals would ~~be~~^{be} a hand-picked Government with no popular movement behind it. Marshal Stalin replied that there were no grounds for this assumption. The Polish landlords, he said, would not be re-admitted to Poland. They were "Polish Tories". Poland needs democrats who will look out for the interests of the people. The

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émigré Government can only create disorder and cause revolution in Poland. If, however, a democratic Government meeting the demands of the people is established, chaos and anarchy can be averted.

The Ambassador remarked that there was no disagreement between the President and Marshal Stalin regarding the desirability of ~~establishing~~ a democratic Government in Poland. Stalin replied that he was sure that there was no disagreement between them on this point. He said that Churchill was making a lot of noise but that sooner or later he would understand.

The Ambassador said that he assumed Marshal Stalin would await the results of Mr. Churchill's action. Stalin replied that Mr. Churchill could accomplish nothing and added that the Poles were deceiving him. He then stated that the Soviet Government had requested through the Soviet Ambassador in Washington that Lange and Orlemanski be permitted to come to Moscow for consultation. He asked why they had not been allowed to come.

The Ambassador replied that he had received no word from the President on this question. Mr. Molotov stated that the President had been going to take the matter under consideration but that Mr. Gromyko had received no reply.

The Ambassador asked whether it was desired that they come to Moscow to cooperate with the Poles here or

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what was the purpose of the proposed visit. Marshal Stalin replied that it was desired to have them come to Moscow, look over the situation, and find out what was going on in Poland, which was easier to do in the Soviet Union than in the United States. They would meet the Poles in Moscow and then return to the United States.

The Ambassador said that it was his understanding that Marshal Stalin would wait and take no immediate action on the Polish question. Stalin replied that he had already informed the President that he thought the time was not ripe.

Before leaving, the Ambassador said that he hoped Marshal Stalin would find a good solution for the Polish question and that he would not have to disturb him again about it. Marshal Stalin replied that he hoped not, but added that it was a question which would take a long time to settle. The Ambassador remarked that he knew the Poles who formed the London Government and that he was a bad defender ^{of some of} ~~of~~ them. He said, however, that there were ~~some~~ ^{men} good ~~Polish~~ in London. Marshal Stalin replied that good people can be found everywhere, even among the Bushmen.

The Ambassador said that we must not let the Polish question come between the two countries. He reiterated that the President was greatly concerned about public opinion in the United States on the Polish question. Marshal Stalin replied that he was concerned about public

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opinion in the Soviet Union. The Ambassador said that Marshal Stalin knew how to handle his public opinion, to which Marshal Stalin replied that there had been three revolutions in Russia within a generation. Molotov added that in Russia there is an active public opinion which overthrows governments.

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SECRET

Conversation. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] March 3, 1944, 9:30 p.m.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] The Kremlin

Present: The American Ambassador, Mr. Harriman

[REDACTED] Mr. F. B. Stevens, Second Secretary of Embassy

[REDACTED] Marshal J. V. Stalin

[REDACTED] Mr. V. M. Molotov

[REDACTED] Mr. Berezhkov, interpreter

Subject: Poland.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador stated that the President feels confidence that, as a result of his talks with Marshal Stalin in Tehran, all problems between them can be settled satisfactorily if each one understands the other's point of view. The President desired that the Ambassador see Marshal Stalin and learn his reactions to the Prime Minister's proposals regarding the settlement of the Polish question and whether a basis for settlement can be found on the strength of these proposals.

[REDACTED] Marshal Stalin replied: "Again the Poles. Is that the most important question?" He said that he had been so occupied with the Poles that he had no time for military matters.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador said that he would prefer to discuss military questions with Marshal Stalin but that the Polish question was pressing.

[REDACTED] Marshal Stalin said that the Soviet Government had taken its position on the Polish question and could not recede therefrom.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador said that he would be as short in his remarks as Marshal Stalin desired. Marshal Stalin observed that it was not a question of time. The Ambassador asked what we could do if the Prime Minister's suggestions did not prove acceptable. He said that the President was anxious to do anything he could to contribute to the solution of the Polish problems.

[REDACTED] Marshal Stalin replied: "Isn't it clear? We stand for the Curzon Line." He said that the Poles now wished Wilno and Lwow. The Polish émigré government in London, he said, is not the same as the Polish people. The Government wants not only Lwow but Wilno. He said that the people in Poland are better than the Government in London and asked whether the Russians were taken for fools.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador stated that he had understood that the Poles had [^indicated a willingness to] accepted the Curzon Line. Marshal Stalin replied that this was not true.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador asked whether, for his information, Marshal Stalin could tell him what information he had regarding the attitude of the people in Poland toward the London Government. Marshal Stalin replied that in his opinion their attitude was negative.

[REDACTED] The Ambassador stated that he did not believe that the American Government had any information on this subject except such as was received through Polish sources

and stated that it would be of interest to receive any information on this point which Marshal Stalin possessed. He explained that he meant the attitude of the Polish people toward the London Government as a group and especially their attitude toward Mikolajczyk and the Generals.

□ Marshal Stalin replied that he was certain of one thing -that the Poles are welcoming the Red Army. He said that he had no interest in their attitude toward Mikolajczyk and other groups. If such information is available, he suggested that the Ambassador could obtain it from the Foreign Office.

□ The Ambassador said that the President desired that all Poles should unite in supporting the Red Army in the war against Germany and that he feared civil war might break out in Poland if a solution to the question was not found. Stalin replied: "War with whom? Between whom? Where?" The Ambassador replied that he meant civil war among the Poles themselves in Poland. Stalin said that there was no danger of this. He said that Mikolajczyk had no troops in Poland nor were there any armed forces of any size in that country.

□ The Ambassador asked about the size of the Polish underground forces. Stalin replied that he did not know but that he was sure they were not large. He remarked that there were "a few agents of the London Government" in Poland.

□ The Ambassador asked in which form Marshal Stalin envisaged an eventual solution of the Polish question. Marshal Stalin replied that while the Red Army is liberating Poland, Mikolajczyk will go on repeating his platitudes. By the time Poland is liberated, Mikolajczyk's Government will have changed or another Government will have emerged in Poland.

□ The Ambassador stated that there seemed to be complete agreement between the three Governments as to what was deemed desirable the ultimate objectives for Poland and that each wished that the Polish people be given a chance freely to choose its their own government. It was a question of how to obtain this objective.

□ Marshal Stalin replied that he did not know how the objective was to be reached. He said that circumstances would be determining and that it was difficult at this stage to predict.

□ The Ambassador asked Marshal Stalin whether he felt there was any position in the matter which [^he would want] the President should to take. Marshal Stalin replied that he had understood from his conversations with the President in Tehran that the President approved the Curzon Line as a basis for settlement. The Ambassador said that he referred to the political aspects of the question. When Stalin remarked that he did not understand, the Ambassador state that the question at issue was not well understood in the United States. He pointed out that we have recognized the Polish Government and that we now consider it to be the Government of Poland. This creates dissatisfaction in the United States and the President is concerned about its effect on public opinion. The Ambassador asked whether Stalin felt that time could cure the situation or whether other steps, such as the reorganization of the Polish Government, should be undertaken.

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