

April 13, 1945
**Stalin's First Conversation with Ambassador
Harriman Following the Death of President
Roosevelt**

Citation:

"Stalin's First Conversation with Ambassador Harriman Following the Death of President Roosevelt", April 13, 1945, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Europe, Volume V, eds. Rogers P. Churchill, William Slany, John G. Reid, N. O. Sappington, Douglas W. Houston (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), 826-829.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/209829>

Summary:

Averell Harriman and Joseph Stalin discuss Harry S. Truman and the death of President Roosevelt.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Memorandum of Conversation by the Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman)

[Moscow,] April 13, 1945 - 8 p.m.

Participants: Marshal Stalin

V.M. Molotov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs

[V.N] [Original Brackets] Pavlov, Interpreter

W.A. Harriman, American Ambassador

Edward Page

When I entered Marshal Stalin's office, I noticed that he was obviously deeply distressed at the news at the death of President Roosevelt. He greeted me in silence and stood holding my hand for about 80 seconds before asking me to sit down.

He then asked me many questions about the President and the circumstances which brought about his death. I explained that the President had heart trouble during the last year; that Dr. Macintyre had informed me that he might live for years or die suddenly. From the information I had received it appeared that the President had gone to Warm Springs for a rest. He was in excellent health and intended to return to Washington forthwith. He had evidently had a stroke and had passed away very suddenly. I commented that Marshal Stalin had probably received the President's last message. That is, the message that I had received last night at 12:00 and transmitted to Marshal Stalin. The President at that time was already dead but when I had sent the message I was not aware of this fact.

I stated that I had come to see Marshal Stalin with the thought that he might wish to ask some questions as to the situation in the United States as a result of the death of President Roosevelt. The Marshal stated that he did not believe that there would be any change in policy. I said that I was convinced that this would be true in so far as the war, foreign policy, and all those other policies where the President had made his plans clear. I continued that I had explained to Mr. Molotov last night why the President had selected Mr. Truman as Vice President. Mr. Truman had always followed the President's program and had heartily supported all his views. Mr. Truman was a man Marshal Stalin would like - he was a man of action and not of words. Mr. Molotov had noted that he had not made many speeches. This was quite true - he was not an individual who sought publicity. He had been in the United States Senate since 1936 and had gained the highest respect from both political parties. The President knew that he would need Senate approval of his peace plans, of Dumbarton Oaks, and of the other important internal and foreign policies. This was one of the main reasons he had chosen Senator Truman for his running mate. I said that I was satisfied that President Truman would carry out President Roosevelt's plans precisely as he understood them. Marshal Stalin was pleased to hear this. I continued that President Truman would not try to interject his own personality into future policies but would have the courage to develop them. From the domestic standpoint, he was a New Dealer - but perhaps in the Center.

On the other hand, I said that President Truman naturally could not have the great prestige that President Roosevelt enjoyed at the time of his death. Until he had become Vice President he was not especially well known in the United States because he had never sought publicity. The same was true abroad. This in my opinion, could not help but cause a certain period of uncertainty, both internally and externally, not necessarily about the conduct of the war but on all foreign and domestic policy questions. The San Francisco Conference, for example, might well cause more difficulties. The American people did not know whether President Truman could carry through President Roosevelt's program as the late President would have done. However it was my belief that President Truman would gain the complete confidence of the American People.

I said that I believed that Marshal Stalin could assist President Truman at this time: this would facilitate in stabilizing the situation in the United States and in solidifying him with the American people. The American People knew that President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin had close personal relations and that this relationship had a great effect on United States - Soviet relations. Marshal Stalin interjected, "President Roosevelt has died but his cause must live on. We shall support President Truman with all our forces and all our will." The Marshal then requested me to inform President Truman accordingly.

I stated that I was going to make a suggestion which might be impossible to realize. I was thinking of what Marshal Stalin might do to help President Truman, to stabilize the situation in America and to reduce the disturbances which had been caused by the death of President Roosevelt. I said that I believed that the most effective way to assure the American public and the world at large of the desire of the Soviet Government to continue collaboration with us and the other United Nations would be for Mr. Molotov to go to the United States at this time. I suggested that he might stop in Washington to see the President and then proceed to San Francisco even though he might remain there only for a few days. I said that if it would assist, I felt sure that we would be pleased to place a plane comparable to the plane in which President Roosevelt had gone to Crimea at the disposal of Mr. Molotov. The plane could make the trip to Washington in 36 hours. If Marshal Stalin so desired, I remarked jokingly, we could paint a red star on the plane and man it with a mixed Soviet - American crew. Marshal Stalin remarked that he would prefer a green star. I continued that these planes could make the trip with great comfort and speed. If Marshal Stalin desired, we would paint the entire aircraft green.

During these exchanges of remarks, Mr. Molotov kept muttering, "Time, time, time."

I continued that these were details connected with the trip. I could not find words to express too strongly what it would mean to the American people and to President Truman, what it would mean to our overall relations, especially at this time on our great tragedy if Mr. Molotov could come to the United States. The entire world would regard his visit as a great stabilizing influence.

After a brief discussion between Mr. Molotov and Marshal Stalin as to the dates of the San Francisco Conference and the convening of the Supreme Soviet, Marshal Stalin inquired whether I was expressing my personal views. I made it clear that I was but added that I felt completely confident that I was expressing the views of the President and the Secretary of State and that I felt sure that they would be ready to confirm what I had said. Marshal Stalin then stated categorically that Mr. Molotov's trip to the United States, although difficult at this time, would be arranged. He made it clear, however, that this decision was based upon my assurances that the President and the Secretary would renew the hope that it would be possible for Mr. Molotov to come to Washington and San Francisco as they considered his presence there at this time of real importance.