

November 9, 1944

**Letter No. 402 from L.D. Wilgress, Canadian
Embassy, Moscow, to the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, W.L. Mackenzie King**

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Summary:

The Canadian Ambassador to the Soviet Union, L.D. Wilgress, thoroughly reviews Soviet foreign policy in Europe, Asia, and in Latin America and its relations with the United States and the United Kingdom. Wilgress optimistically concludes that "the Soviet Government are desirous of co-operating fully with the other great powers."

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Canadian Embassy, Moscow,
November 9th, 1944.No. 402

Sir,

I have the honour to report that, in spite of some recent manifestations of Soviet policy, I still believe that the Soviet Government are desirous of co-operating fully with the other great powers in laying the foundations for a lasting peace. By this I have never intended to convey that the Soviet Government would at all times placidly conform to the pattern sketched by the Anglo-Saxon powers. They will continue aggressively and in their own peculiar manner to exert their will on international policy whenever they consider their special interests are involved, but the main objective will be the avoidance of international unrest if this can be accomplished without jeopardising their vital interests. The reasons for this main objective are not unselfish in that the Soviet Government wish above all else to have a long period of external security in order that they can accomplish the tasks of internal reconstruction, which in the end will result in the country becoming still more powerful economically and therefore militarily.

2. This view is disputed by many, otherwise well-informed, observers abroad, who hold that the Soviet Government are motivated by aggressive intentions and are aiming to incorporate within the Soviet Union many of the territories on her western, southern and eastern borders. Those who hold this view are confirmed in their opinion by certain recent actions and policies of the Soviet Government, just as those who hold the contrary view are encouraged by the magnanimity shown by the Soviet Government in the recent armistice negotiations with Roumania, Finland and Bulgaria, their cooperative action in regard to Yugoslavia, their willingness to assist in making effective international organs, such as the international Security Organization, U.N.R.R., the Food and Agricultural Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, and their pains to maintain unity in the Anglo-American-Soviet coalition against Nazi Germany. As so often happens those who hold the opposing sets of views go to extremes in expounding their respective theses and draw too far-reaching conclusions in support of these theses from recent manifestations of Soviet policy. The truth lies somewhere in between and the difficulty is to place the proper valuation on such evidence as we possess. In adhering to my principal contention that the Soviet Government wish to follow a policy not of aggression but of avoiding actions that will disturb international harmony to any serious extent it is incumbent upon me to examine some of the evidence to the contrary produced by those who attribute motives of aggression to the Soviet Government. This can best be done by reviewing Soviet policies in relation to other countries and those recent actions that have caused uneasiness even in the minds of those confident of the peaceful intentions of the Soviet leaders.

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The Right Honourable,
The Secretary of State
for External Affairs,
OTTAWA, Canada.

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3. The most disturbing recent signs of overt Soviet pressure on her smaller neighbours are the attacks in the Soviet press against Turkey and Iran. As regards the former the attacks are comparatively mild and may be said to reflect in part displeasure at Turkish failure to enter the war before it was too late. They probably also are a preparation for the day when the question of the Straits will become once more a principal subject of international controversy. The Soviet Union undoubtedly feels that the Montreux Convention must be scrapped because it does not accord recognition to the paramount interest of the Soviet Union, as the leading Black Sea power, in the question of navigation through the Straits. I should be surprised, however, if in putting forward what she considers to be her just claims for the internationalization of the Straits the Soviet Union will do anything which will create uneasiness about her intentions towards the integrity of Turkey or about her desire to play a role in the Mediterranean. The readiness with which the Soviet Government have accorded the United Kingdom a free hand in Greece shows that the Soviet Union is not ambitious as yet to meddle in either Mediterranean or Middle Eastern affairs, although undoubtedly in the future she will watch developments there closely and endeavour to increase her influence gradually by promoting economic and cultural relations.

4. More subtle reasons must be looked for in the recent crude bullying of Iran as a result of the refusal of the Iranian Government to grant now a concession to the Soviet Union for the exploration and exploitation of oil resources in northern Iran. I take this to signify a warning to Iran not to indulge in the old game of playing one great power off against another. British policy has been to bring the United States into Iran as a counter-weight to the Soviet Union. This has been resented by the Soviet Government who fear the possibility of future clashes with the North American colossus if the latter becomes embroiled in any of the countries bordering on the Soviet Union. The Iranian Government in refusing to grant the oil concession may have believed that after the war United States interests would outbid the Soviet Union for the concession. The Soviet Government response is to make clear to the Iranian Government that the integrity of Iran will be respected only to the extent that the Iranian Government recognise the division of the country into the already defined British and Soviet zones and keep outsiders out of the Soviet zone.

5. The Afghan Ambassador in Moscow has been even more apprehensive than the Iranian Ambassador about future Soviet intentions towards his country. A border incident has arisen over disputed ownership of some islands in the River Amu Darya which serves as the boundary between the two countries. These islands have been occupied by Soviet troops and the Soviet Government state that the border dispute can be adjudicated after the war. Difficulties have also arisen through the friendly reception accorded by the Afghan Government to Uzbeks and Tadjiks who to the number of 40,000 have sought refuge in Afghanistan from collectivized agriculture and religious persecution. It is clear, however, that the Soviet Government will seek to maintain correct relations with Afghanistan so long as India remains part of the British Empire and the Anglo-Soviet Alliance continues to be one of the corner-stones of Soviet foreign policy.

6. The most recent indications of Soviet policy towards China have been pressure to secure the removal of Governor Sheng from Sinkiang and attacks in the Soviet press against the Central Government for using a large force of well-equipped troops to blockade the Communists, thereby showing more interest in preventing the spread of Communism than in fighting the

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Japanese. On the Sinkiang issue the Soviet Government were seeking to eliminate a governor whom they considered to be hostile to the Soviet Union and whom the Central Government were unable to control. The removal of Governor Sheng has eliminated this cause for friction and the Chinese Ambassador reports an improvement in relations as a result. Here as in other border districts the test will be the ability of the Central Government to maintain effective control. As regards the Chinese Communists there is little evidence that the Soviet Union is interfering in Chinese politics or according material support to the Communists. On the other hand the Communist issue does provide a useful instrument for the Soviet Government to bring pressure to bear on China by instituting whenever they see fit press attacks on the dictatorial and non-democratic character of the Central Government.

7. In its policy towards China the Soviet Union will be guided by the consideration that a strong China is just as likely to be a threat to Soviet interests in the Far East as a strong Japan. For this reason there may be some substance to Chinese fears that the Soviet Government might like to see established a series of small socialist states in North China stretching from Outer Mongolia to Manchuria and from the Amur to the Yellow River. It is not likely, however, that the Soviet Government will take any positive steps to further these plans if in doing so it would bring them into serious disagreement with the United States. They realise very well that there is no area where conflict of views with the United States is more likely to cause serious trouble than China. Being nearly as dependent upon United States economic assistance as China itself they will be careful to respect the territorial integrity and sovereign rights of China so long as the United States Government support the Central Government of that country. This does not mean that the Soviet Government will refrain from doing everything possible to increase economic and cultural relations with such territories as Sinkiang and Manchuria, but any special political and economic concessions probably only will be sought in agreement with the other Allies as part of the bargain for the participation of the Soviet Union in the war against Japan. This might apply, for instance, to transit rights over the Manchurian railways and port facilities at Dairen. On the other hand it is unlikely that any tears will be shed in the Kremlin if China through its own weakness should split up into a number of units leaving only small powerless states along the border with the Soviet Union.

8. The settlement with Japan may present the possibility of differences between the Soviet Union and the United States over territorial adjustments in the Pacific. The Soviet Union may want and, if they participate in the war against Japan, probably will receive the southern half of the Island of Sakhalin. The Soviet Government, however, may put forward claims for the Kurile Islands which extend from the southern tip of Kamchatka to Japan. Certainly, they would not welcome the transfer of any of these islands to United States ownership or control.

9. Turning to the western frontier of the Soviet Union we find a very varied picture depending on the type of regime in power in each of the neighbouring countries. The most encouraging example of the correctness of Soviet policy is the

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attitude towards Finland since the signature of the armistice agreement with that country. Finnish stubbornness has won the respect of the Soviet leaders and with faithful execution by the Finns of the armistice terms there has developed a trend towards the cultivation of friendly feelings between the peoples of the two countries. The Finns for their part are greatly relieved that their fears about Soviet troops occupying the more settled districts in Northern Finland and about Soviet interference in Finnish politics have proved to be unfounded.

10. Poland continues to be a major threat to allied harmony. Most blame must be ascribed to the anti-Soviet attitude of the Polish emigres from whom the Polish Government in London have derived their chief support, but the emergence of Mr. Bierut with his communist antecedents has created misgivings about the intentions of the Soviet Government respecting Poland. Soviet policy is directed at the removal of any possibility of a regime coming to power in a future independent Poland which will prosecute policies hostile to the Soviet Union and thus make Poland a base for anti-Soviet intrigues. This probably can be achieved only by destroying the vestiges of feudalism in the Polish social structure, and thus there comes about a considerable degree of interference in the internal affairs of Poland. Unfortunately there is enough similarity between this situation and the United States attitude towards the present regime in Argentina to enable the Soviet Government to draw comparisons. However, the proximity of Poland, while justifying more interest by the Soviet Union in the type of government in power in that country, does tend to place the Poles in a position of dependence on the Soviet Union and definitely to earmark Poland as part of the Soviet sphere of influence. The solution in my opinion is to strive after the war to bring about economic cooperation between all the relatively politically weak units occupying "the peninsula of Europe." The United States with its practical altruism and its political disinterestness in Europe is in the best position to promote this objective as an offset to the tendency for the division of Europe into spheres of influence.

11. In marked contrast to Poland, Czechoslovakia remains the one country in eastern Europe following consistently the policy of close cooperation with the Soviet Union without jeopardising its political independence. With its highly developed industry and its strategic geographical position Czechoslovakia could do much in association with the industrial countries of western Europe to bring about that economic cooperation referred to in the preceding paragraph. This would be consistent with the previous policies of Czechoslovakia, and, if carefully handled, need not endanger the close understanding reached with the Soviet Union in the political sphere. The success which the Czechoslovaks have achieved in the latter respect gives them a unique opportunity for leadership in the post-war reconstruction of Europe, provided they receive the correct degree of encouragement from the two Anglo-Saxon powers.

12. Judging from the Soviet press the Soviet Government are not very satisfied with the present political situation in Roumania. The government of that country is criticised for not carrying out a sufficiently drastic purge of pro-fascist elements. The criticism is directed chiefly against the National Peasant Party and the Liberal Party and it would seem that the Soviet leaders would like to see these two parties

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eliminated from the government and a new regime installed in which the Communist Party would have more influence. The Roumanians thought they were being astute when they appointed Mr. Patrascanu, one of the Communist leaders, as head of their armistice delegation but this made no apparent difference to the manner in which they were treated in Moscow and M. Patrascanu probably lost face with his followers as a consequence. Since then, however, the Soviet press has kept up a constant criticism of the right-wing of the government, particularly the factions led by Maniu and Bratianu. The Roumanian Government have also been criticised for the manner in which they are carrying out the armistice terms, particularly the return of machinery and other industrial equipment looted from the Soviet Union. There have also been reports of difficulties having arisen between the foreign-owned oil companies and the Soviet Armistice Control Commission over the ownership of piping and other oil-well equipment. On the whole it looks as if Roumania is likely to provide a source of considerable trouble in the future and that the Soviet Government will not be so scrupulous in avoiding interference in the internal affairs of Roumania as they are in the case of Czechoslovakia. Like Poland, Roumania appears to have come very definitely within the Soviet sphere of influence.

¹³ The Soviet Union have very close historical and cultural ties with Bulgaria and the people of that country are very friendly disposed towards the peoples of the Soviet Union. The geographical position of Bulgaria, however, brings it very close to those Mediterranean interests which the United Kingdom regards as its concern. Mr. Eden achieved a real victory in Moscow last month in securing Soviet recognition of that fact. Nevertheless the occupation of Bulgaria by Soviet troops has led to the Soviet Union becoming more strongly entrenched in that country than ever in the past and henceforth we may expect the Bulgarian Government to pursue a consistently pro-Soviet policy. While this will lead to the influence of the Soviet Union throughout the Balkans becoming very great, it need not imply a threat to the integrity of Bulgaria. This threat probably will be lessened further if the Soviet Government succeed in supplanting the Montreux Convention with a new convention providing for international instead of Turkish control over the Straits.

¹⁴ A few weeks ago it looked as if the Soviet Government were still distrustful of the Yugoslav Government headed by Premier Subasic and inclined to favour the consolidation of control by the Yugoslav Committee of National Liberation headed by Marshal Tito. Mr. Eden was able to satisfy himself that the Soviet Government are anxious that Yugoslavia should not become another Poland and that they are willing to cooperate with the United Kingdom Government in the establishment of a government of national unity in Yugoslavia. Many problems still face that country but apparently it is to be spared a divergency of policies by the great powers and will be permitted to work out its own salvation with the minimum of interference from outside.

¹⁵ Admiral Horthy, while still Regent of Hungary, wrote a personal letter to Marshal Stalin last month seeking an armistice. He acted too late and was not in a position to swing all of his people to turning on the Germans. Hungary, therefore, will be conquered and there is no knowing what will happen. It is unlikely, however, that this country will prove a bone of contention between the great powers. It is too small to be of interest to the Soviet Union. Although

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Hungary has a more pronouncedly feudal social structure than Poland, there have been very few attacks in the Soviet press against the Hungarian magnates. This is because they have shown little enthusiasm for Naziism and Hitler has found his support mostly among the middle class of Budapest to whom his anti-semitism appealed for economic reasons.

¹⁶ The Soviet leaders assured Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden when they were in Moscow last month that they were not interested in Greece and that they recognised the importance of Greece to the United Kingdom as the principal Mediterranean power. No doubt the corollary to this is that the United Kingdom should recognise the paramount interests of the Soviet Union in territories of special interest to the latter country. Comparatively little interest in Italy is now being shown by the Soviet Government and the minor struggle which took place over that country last year probably was for the purpose of assuring the Soviet Union of its place as a full and equal member of the three-power coalition as well as to gain the sympathy of left-wing elements everywhere for the championship of a government representative of progressive forces and completely purged of reactionary elements.

¹⁷ Throughout the past two years the Soviet Government have been taking a very great interest in France and have been posing as the supporter of the progressive elements in France as against the more doubtful support of the other two great powers. When official recognition was accorded recently to the Government of France the Soviet Government allowed the rumour to circulate in Moscow that they all along had been in favour of recognition and that it had been hesitation on the part of the other two great powers that had deferred action until now. Behind the scenes, however, Soviet policy towards the French Committee of National Liberation had been vacillating, depending largely upon the extent to which General de Gaulle was influenced by the right or left-wing members of the Committee. The Soviet press recently has given prominence to telegrams from Paris reporting dissatisfaction with the decree disbanding the Patriotic Militia. This, however, has not prevented the Soviet Government from coming out with the proposal that France should be made a full member of the European Advisory Commission when all that Mr. Eden had proposed last month was that France should attend meetings of the Commission when matters relating to Germany were being discussed. Soviet policy probably is to woo France and prevent her from becoming too closely allied with the United Kingdom which would have the result of aligning the countries of western Europe into a close partnership for the furtherance of their common interests in the light of the new balance of power throughout the world.

¹⁸ There is good reason to believe that the Soviet Government have been disappointed at how the Anglo-Soviet Treaty Alliance of May 26th, 1942, is working out in practice. When the treaty was signed they hoped that this would mean the regulation of Europe by the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, the former being responsible for western Europe and the latter for eastern Europe. They also hoped that the United States would not take too great an interest in European affairs. The day the treaty was signed Mr. Maisky, the then Soviet Ambassador in London, remarked that it would help the United Kingdom to withstand pressure from the United States. After that, however, the United Kingdom commenced to shape its policy closely to that of the United States.

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There commenced the frequent conferring together of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt. The practice grew to such an extent that the Soviet Government commenced to feel themselves an inferior member of the three-power coalition. This feeling became pronounced at the time of the 1943 Quebec Conference but was allayed by the successful outcome of the Moscow and Teheran Conferences which followed shortly thereafter. The conversations which took place last month when Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden were in Moscow further successfully restored the proper understanding between the two Allies, but the Soviet Government are now under no illusions about the necessity of the United Kingdom closely coordinating its policy, even as regards Europe, with that of the United States. Hence the Soviet desire that France should not become too closely aligned with the United Kingdom.

¹⁹
20. Uneasiness already can be detected in the United States that the Soviet Union may stir up political unrest in Latin America. There is nothing that I can think of more likely to prejudice that economic cooperation of the United States in the internal reconstruction of the Soviet Union than apparent interference by the latter country in the affairs of the Latin American countries. It would be my surmise that the Soviet diplomatic missions already established in Mexico, Cuba, Columbia and Uruguay have been enjoined strictly to avoid giving any appearance of being interested in the internal political developments of the countries in which they are stationed. I think you have found this to be the attitude of the Soviet Embassy at Ottawa and while the Latin American countries offer a more fertile field for encouraging political unrest, I should be surprised to find that the Soviet Government would consider the present or the immediate post-war period suitable for exerting that influence they are in a position to exercise on developments in those Latin American countries ripe for political change.

21. What probably has caused most uneasiness of late has been the Soviet attitude towards participation in some of the international organizations now being set up to regulate the post-war world. The Soviet demand that the permanent members of the proposed Security Council participate and have the right of veto in cases in which they are parties to a dispute can be regarded as equivalent to asking that the great powers should be above the law. The Soviet attitude, however, is largely a reflection of the past suspicion and mistrust in which the Soviet Union was regarded by other countries. While the activities of the Comintern were basically the reason for treating the Soviet Union as a pariah, there was a great deal in the attitude of other countries that the Soviet leaders are unable to forget and this makes them take precautions to preclude a ganging up of other countries against them. This explains the difference of views that arose at Dumbarton Oaks about voting in the Security Council. Mr. Molotov's plea to the British Ambassador that other countries should learn to trust the Soviet Union does show that the Soviet Government believe in and wish to make effective the system of security envisaged in the proposals for an International Security Organization. They will support the organization fully so long as it is not used to thwart what they consider to be their just aspirations. It is true that if any other important country made such a reservation, the system would not be worth the effort expended on making it work, but under the conditions whereby the Soviet Union emerges from the war as the predominant military power on

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the Eurasian land mass it is probably the only basis on which complete Soviet cooperation in the maintenance of a long period of peace can be secured and as such is worth trying. Certainly the Dumbarton Oaks proposals in themselves should provide an effective guarantee against the resurgence of German aggression. It will keep Germany and all smaller countries quiet even if it cannot "police the policemen."

²¹
20. It is ironical that just about the time there are published the details of a system of security designed to curb effectively renewed German aggression, there should be a spate of schemes for accomplishing the same end by destroying German industry and thus depriving the peaceful world economy of one of its most productive units. Naturally such schemes meet with a ready response in the Soviet Union where the loss of German economic cooperation in the future would be more than compensated for by the complete disappearance of the base of the military power of the only rival to the Soviet Union on the Continent of Europe. This is the danger inherent in putting forward schemes for the future of Germany that are devoid of any constructive features. The one rock on which future cooperation between the Soviet Union and the other two great powers is most likely to founder is the treatment to be meted out to Germany. It is essential to the future peace and welfare of Europe as well as of the world that the German people should have the opportunity of devoting their energy and skill to contributing a large share to mankind's common pool of peacetime products. The Soviet Union will be out for a hard peace no matter how destructive the terms and if we are to be spared a peace settlement devoid of constructive features there must be resistance on the part of the other two great powers to the extreme proposals likely to be formulated in Moscow. The German problem will have to be handled carefully if harmony among the Big Three is to be maintained, but it is doubtful that the Soviet Union would withhold its cooperation simply because it could not have its own way entirely over the settlement with Germany.

2a. There are functional fields in which it will be difficult to attain full Soviet cooperation. This will be mostly for military or security reasons, such as in the case of the regulation of post-war civil aviation. In other cases it will be because the Soviet Union will not wish international organizations having too much authority in eastern Europe as illustrated by the case of the proposed European Inland Transport Organization. The great influence of the N.K.V.D. (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) and their antipathy to foreigners learning too much about the Soviet Union will preclude the granting of permission to foreign experts or commissions to come to the Soviet Union to conduct investigations or functions on behalf of international organizations. All this is a reflection of the extreme centralization of power in the Soviet Union and the lack of faith in either external or internal security, but it does not mean an unwillingness on the part of the Soviet Union to cooperate fully in the maintenance of peace.

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21. To sum up, we can see that it is going to be very difficult to get along with the Soviet Union and trouble may constantly be arising over matters of important but not vital concern. On the large issues that determine peace or war - even on those that determine a sense of security or international uneasiness - we may expect that the Soviet Union

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will throw its full weight behind the forces working for peace and security. In no other way can the Soviet leaders carry out their aims of reconstructing the economy of the country, of repairing the glaring weaknesses in that economy and of making a people that have had to bear terrific hardships for nearly thirty years at least, reasonably happy and content.

I have the honour
to be, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

(Sgd) L.D. Wilgress.

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