

March 3, 1944

**Stalin's conversation with Averell Harriman about
the Polish Government**

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Summary:

Ambassador Averell Harriman and Joseph Stalin discuss the questions concerning the future of the Polish government.

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Contents:

Transcript - English

"Again the Poles," Stalin growled. "Is that the most important question?" Those troublesome Poles, he complained to Harriman, kept him so busy that he had no time for military matters.

The date was March 3, 1944. Harriman, who had requested the Kremlin meeting on instructions from Roosevelt, replied that he too would prefer to discuss military questions, but Poland had become a pressing problem. He promised to be brief. It was not a question of time, Stalin said. The Russians had taken their position and would not recede from it: "Isn't it clear? We stand for the Curzon Line." The trouble was that the Polish government in London (he called it 'the émigré government') took the Russians for fools. It was now demanding Wilno as well as Lwow. Happily, the people of Poland, who were not the same as the London émigrés, would take a different attitude. He was certain they would welcome the Red Army as liberators.

Harriman did not doubt that Stalin believed this would happen. Only later, when he learned that his troops were widely regarded as foreign invaders, did Stalin find it necessary - in Harriman's view - to impose rigid controls on Poland and Rumania. For the moment, Harriman's task was to persuade Stalin and Molotov that they should resume discussions with the Poles in London and try to negotiate a settlement instead of imposing one by brute force. It was hard going.

Roosevelt feared, Harriman said, that if the problem was not soon resolved, there would be civil war in Poland. Stalin saw no such danger. "War with whom?" he asked. "Between whom? Where?" Mikolajczyk had no troops in Poland. What about the underground force known as the Home Army? Harriman inquired. Stalin grudgingly acknowledged that the London government might have "a few agents" in Poland, but the underground, he insisted, was not large.

Harriman asked what kind of solution Stalin could envisage. He replied, "While the Red Army is liberating Poland, Mikolajczyk's Government will have changed, or another government will have emerged in Poland."

Roosevelt was concerned, Harriman said, lest a new regime formed on the basis of the Soviet proposals, should turn out to be "a hand-picked government with no popular movement behind it." Denying any such intention, Stalin nevertheless proceeded to rule out the return from exile of Polish landlords- "Polish Tories," as he called them. "Poland," he said, "needs democrats who will look after the interests of the people, not Tory landlords." Stalin added that he did not believe Churchill (a British Tory after all) could persuade the London Poles to reshape their government and modify its policies; he was sure that Roosevelt agreed with him on the need for a democratic government in Poland.

Stalin assured Harriman, however, that he would take no immediate action on the Polish matter. The time was not ripe, he said. When Harriman remarked that there were some good men in the London government, Stalin replied, "Good people can be found everywhere, even among the Bushmen."

Not for the first time, Harriman mentioned the President's worries over public opinion in the United States. Stalin responded that he had to be "concerned about public opinion in the Soviet Union." Harriman remarked, "You know how to handle your public opinion," to which Stalin replied, "There have been three revolutions in a generation." Molotov, who had been silent through most of the interview, added without smiling, "In Russia, there is an active public opinion which overthrows governments." When they spoke of three revolutions, Stalin and Molotov meant the uprising of 1905, the Kerensky revolution of February 1917, and the Bolshevik Revolution the following autumn. Stalin, the revolutionist, was always alert to the possibility of a new revolution, which would have to be stamped out before it got started.

[...]

Harriman's second talk with Stalin on March 3 went no better. "Again with the Poles" Stalin had said, in a mood of aggravated annoyance with the exile government. Harriman had come away with no encouragement other than Stalin's promise to take no immediate action because, as he said, the time was not ripe.