

October 17, 1944
Record of Meeting Held at the Kremlin on 17
October 1944, at 10 p.m.

Citation:

"Record of Meeting Held at the Kremlin on 17 October 1944, at 10 p.m.", October 17, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Public Record Office
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/123190>

Summary:

Churchill and Stalin discuss the progress of the war in Europe and its brutality. They propose three alternative plans of German dismemberment and how German assets should be divided among the Allies. They discuss further punishments and reparations.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

RECORD OF MEETING HELD AT THE KREMLIN ON THE
17th OCTOBER 1944, AT 10 p.m.

Present:

Prime Minister. Marshal Stalin.
Secretary of State. M. Molotov.
Sir Archibald Clark Kerr. M. Pavlov.
Mr. Birse.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he had some notes before him on the dismemberment of Germany.

MARSHAL STALIN interrupted to refer to the Hungarian Question. Horthy had been arrested by the Germans.

Marshal Stalin did not propose to make public that the Hungarian Mission was in Moscow as it might do Horthy harm. Horthy had denied that the Mission had been sent to Moscow. The Hungarian army was disobeying the new Hungarian authorities and there was trouble going on within the country.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked whether the army was trying to save Horthy.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that it was not: because it was too weak in Budapest. He thought some divisions would fight hard against the Russians but some would certainly side with the Red Army.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that this was not so bad.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that the situation was not good but it might have been worse.

Mr. EDEN remarked that it was bad for the Germans internally because they would have to tell their people that they had arrested their old Ally.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed but pointed out that the Germans did not care much for public opinion. The situation for the Germans in Hungary would become worse because they had no sympathisers.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked about the situation of the troops surrounded by the Red Army.

MARSHAL STALIN replied that part had broken through, namely most of the Germans. This referred to two armoured and three infantry divisions of which one was Hungarian. The Red Army had been trying to close the gap and might succeed in capturing a few divisions. This was near Debrecin. In Transylvania the enemy troops had not been surrounded but were in danger of encirclement (in Eastern Transylvania) Austrian garrisons had been transferred to Hungary.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he hoped we could push forward to Lublyana Gap, as fast as possible. The Americans were sending troops from the Italian front. The weather was in favour of the defenders. We had 28 divisions in Italy. He did not think the war would be over before the Spring on military grounds.

MARSHAL STALIN suggested that it would not be over before the Spring or early Summer.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he hoped the Marshal understood what powerful blows were being delivered by our Air forces in the West. We were destroying cities on the ground: they were advance bases for the Army. 10,000 tons had been dropped in twelve hours on Duisburg.

MARSHAL STALIN said that was good.

THE PRIME MINISTER said it would go on. The war had never been so cruel as now. This war was the most cruel since the Stone Age.

MARSHAL STALIN remarked that in the Stone Age prisoners of war were eaten up.

THE PRIME MINISTER said we had made some progress since then. Talking of eating, Britain had managed to arrange for the despatch of 45,000 tons of corned beef to the Soviet Union to meet Marshal Stalin's request. We were also sending 11,000 Soviet ex-prisoners of war to eat the beef.

MARSHAL STALIN said he would not like to eat Hitler. With regard to the Soviet prisoners a great many had been made to fight for the Germans while others had done so willingly.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that that was our difficulty in separating the two. As they had surrendered to us we had the right to speak for them and he hoped that all would be sent back to Russia.

Dismemberment of Germany

MARSHAL STALIN asked what they were to do with Germany.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked Mr. Eden to make his suggestions.

Mr. EDEN explained that we had come to no conclusion but there were three alternative courses :-

- (1) Dismemberment, without any relation to the old German States.
- (2) To use some of the old States as a basis.
- (3) To impose a permanent international control on the chief industrial area, the Rhine, the Ruhr, the Saar and Westfalia, after Russia and the other Allies had taken what they needed in material. This area would be separated from Germany.

MARSHAL STALIN asked: Who would exercise control over the industrial area?

MR. EDEN replied: The Allies.

MARSHAL STALIN asked if it would only be economic control.

MR. EDEN replied that it would be a general control.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that Prussia was the root of the evil and the Prussian military caste.

MARSHAL STALIN said that Prussia contributed the man-power.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested the isolation of Prussia and control over the Ruhr and the Saar. How this was to be done could be discussed later. First, it was necessary to take away all the machinery and machine tools that Russia, Belgium, Holland and France needed. He would support Marshal Stalin in repairing the damage to Russia's Western provinces which had suffered so much. It was only fair. The same applied to the smaller Allies. This was the policy which Mr. Morgenthau had laid before the President to put the Ruhr and Saar out of action. Mr. Morgenthau's hatred of the Germans was indescribable.

MARSHAL STALIN said he must be a second Vansittart.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the President had liked what Morgenthau had said. Continuing, he asked why the British should not make the things needed by Europe in fair competition with other countries. After this war Britain would be the only great debtor nation. Their foreign securities, amounting to £400,000,000 had been sold. Britain's sterling debts now amounted to £3,000 million. She would have to make every effort to increase her exports to buy food. Russia's intention to take away German machinery was in harmony with Britain's interests of filling in the gap in the place of Germany. This was only justice.

MARSHAL STALIN said he would support any steps taken by Britain to receive compensation for the losses she had suffered.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he would support Russia in getting the machine tools required by the Ukraine and other ravaged regions.

The Prime Minister went on to say that they had not been thinking of Germany up to that point. They must now devote their minds to that problem. He would not trust Germany with the development of her metallurgy, chemical or electrical industries. He would stop those altogether for as long as he had a word to say, and he hoped for a generation at least. He had not thought about the division of Prussia, but only of its isolation and of cutting off those two centres, the Ruhr and the Saar, from Prussia. They were centres of war production and machine building.

MARSHAL STALIN asked if he was to understand that Mr. Churchill's suggestion provided for an independent State of Prussia after the cession of territory to Poland.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that Poland would get a slice of East Prussia and Silesia. The Kiel Canal would be neutralized. The Ruhr and the Saar would be put permanently out of action.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether the Ruhr and the Saar would be separate States.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had only been thinking of destroying industry. He had a vivid memory of the last war. We had stopped Germany from having an army, navy and air force. We had destroyed her weapons.

MARSHAL STALIN interrupted to say that it was unwise to destroy Germany's weapons. The navy should not be sunk and artillery should not be blown up. They might be useful against Japan.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that Russia could take what she wanted.

MARSHAL STALIN thought Britain could use some of Germany's ships.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that Russia could do the same, but in the future air would be stronger than the fleet.

MARSHAL STALIN said that Great Powers could not be without navies. Germany's mistake was that she had wanted to conquer Europe although she had no fleet. The point was she had no fuel in Europe and was short of food, and a fleet was necessary to carry fuel and food. Germany had not understood this.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Britain intended to maintain a strong fleet and a strong air component. She would welcome the appearance of a strong Russian fleet on all the seas. She would create no obstacles to Russia's having a fleet.

THE PRIME MINISTER went on to say that after the last war Rathenau had told the Germans after they had been deprived of their army and navy that it would not matter. He would arrange factories and make new weapons. If factories were arranged Germany would become a great Power quicker than any of the others. Brüning carried on with this policy, but no one dared go into production until Hitler appeared. Hitler did not invent this theme. Rathenau and Brüning had thought of it. Hitler only pulled the lever. It should not happen again. Industrial disarmament was the important thing. To begin with, the machine tools must be taken away.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed and added that all metallurgical works should be destroyed. They were difficult to restore. Germany produced four times more pig iron than England.

A map of Germany was then produced.

Marshal Stalin asked whether France wanted access to the Rhine.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that France wanted the West bank of the Rhine internationalised. Czechoslovakia was ready to give up a small area near Eger, but wanted some readjustment of the frontier in the North for strategic reasons.

The Prime Minister suggested that Bavaria and Austria should go together with Vienna as the capital and form a separate State with Würtemberg and Baden. There would be three States in Germany: Bavaria and Austria - soft treatment. Prussia - hard treatment. The industrial area on the Rhine - under international control. Saxony, when stripped, might go to Prussia.

Mr. EDEN pointed out that if in the future Bavaria again wanted to combine with Prussia she might draw Austria after her.

MARSHAL STALIN said that Hungary would have to remain a separate State. Neither the Hungarians nor the Slavs should ever form part of any German State. They were too weak and Germany was too cultured. Germany would quickly dominate them. Marshal Stalin said that the small nations in Europe should be made to police Germany. The Poles would be glad to take a hand in the occupation. The Poles deserved to get territory on their Western borders. They had suffered much for over a century.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked what the Marshal thought of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary forming a separate grouping.

MARSHAL STALIN asked whether it would be an entente.

THE PRIME MINISTER explained that it would be more than an entente, it would be a Zollverein. The evil in Europe was that travelling across it one used many different currencies, passed a dozen frontiers, many customs barriers, and all this was a great obstacle to trade. He wanted to see Europe prosperous and some of the old glory

return to her. In this way perhaps hatred would die. He thought this might be achieved by groupings for commercial and trade purposes.

MARSHAL STALIN suggested that this question might crop up somewhat later but the immediate point was that after this war all States would be very nationalistic. The Hungarians, Czechs and Poles would first want to build up their national life and not restrict their own rights by combining with others. The feeling to live independently would be the strongest. Later, economic feelings would prevail, but in the first period they would be purely nationalistic and therefore groupings would be unwelcome. The fact that Hitler's regime had developed nationalism could be seen in the example of Yugoslavia where Croats, Montenegrins, Slovenes, &c., all wanted something of their own. It was a symptom.

M. MOLOTOV said that after the last war many new small States had been formed. Many of them had failed. It would be dangerous to go to the other extreme after this war and to force States to form groups. It would be impossible for Czechs and Hungarians to unite and to find a common language immediately after his war. Nor could the Czech and Poles do so. They all had a great desire for an independent life. The fact was that their independence had been of short duration.

THE PRIME MINISTER hoped that some of the young men present would see it.

MARSHAL STALIN thought that Mr. Churchill's suggestion would be possible in the future but not just yet.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that Germany should be deprived of all her aviation.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed and suggested that neither civil nor military flying should be allowed. All training schools for pilots should be forbidden.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Mr. Morgenthau had suggested that Germany should have no merchant shipping. She should be made to hire ships from other countries to carry her goods.

MARSHAL STALIN agreed and said that a merchant fleet provided manpower for the navy. The absence of a merchant fleet prevented the creation of a navy.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that there was very little divergence of opinion between them. It was a pity that when God created the world he had not consulted them.

MARSHAL STALIN said it was God's first mistake.

Mr. EDEN suggested that M. Gusev should get on with the preparatory work in the E.A.C.

MARSHAL STALIN said that the principles should be laid down by the three governments and that the E.A.C. should be given some guidance.

THE PRIME MINISTER hoped that there would be no difficulty in convincing the Chinese.

M. MOLOTOV remarked that they were rather difficult and could not settle their own affairs.

MARSHAL STALIN said he thought they were careless. The Russians had offered to build a factory for them. The Chinese said they would report to their government and for ten years they have been reporting and nothing had been done.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that they should now shape their views and tell the United States what progress had been made in focusing their points of view.

MARSHAL STALIN said he had one more question to discuss and that was about the Straits. He wanted the Prime Minister to remember this subject.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked Marshal Stalin to state secretly what improvement he suggested. In principle he was of opinion that the Montreux Convention ought not to remain in force.

MARSHAL STALIN said he only wanted Mr. Churchill to bear the matter in mind as the Soviet Government would raise it. There would be no great divergence between them and no extravagant demands. The Marshal to send in his requirements. Moreover, under the Convention Japan had the same right as Russia.

THE PRIME MINISTER remarked that the Suez Canal was open to warships to pass in peace and war.

MARSHAL STALIN said it was intolerable that Turkey if threatened was entitled to close the Straits. Someone else should decide. As regards constructive proposals Marshal Stalin would make them in due course.

M. MOLOTOV raised the question of reparations from Hungary.

MARSHAL STALIN said that if we found £400 million too much would we agree to 200,000,000 dollars to Russia and 100,000,000 dollars for the other countries concerned?

THE PRIME MINISTER and Mr. EDEN thought that was acceptable.