

## *Roosevelt and Stalin (I)*

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IT IS UNLIKELY that history holds a stranger, more improbable and unequal political courtship than President Roosevelt's courtship of Marshal Stalin in World War II. The very idea is arresting: Roosevelt, patrician, born with the silver spoon, Groton- and Harvard-educated aristocrat in American politics; Stalin, low-born revolutionist and bandit from early years, successor by sheer ruthlessness to Lenin as absolute ruler of the Soviet Union, liquidator of the kulak class in the Ukraine, purger of his own party, and totalitarian to the core. That a liaison of any kind should have existed between these two men is barely credible. That the liaison was a political courtship, initiated and pursued by the patrician and exploited by the revolutionist, is the stuff of political fantasy.

Roosevelt's pursuit of Stalin is well known after forty years of diaries, memoirs, letters, and biographies since the war. But on the evidence of a rising amount of writing by scholars and journalists, it is seemingly not known well or not remembered well. More and more we find the Roosevelt courtship denied altogether, or dismissed as trivia, or otherwise deprecated. This is negligence compounded with ideology. For however we choose to assess the courtship—as the work of idealism and Olympian vision, or as appalling naiveté and credulity, it is a significant episode in the war: one that had effect on Roosevelt's relationship with Churchill, on actual war strategy and the

politics of the peace settlement, and, not for a moment to be missed, on patterns of foreign policy opinion in the United States during the four decades following the war.

Moreover, Roosevelt's indulgence of Stalin has been noted and judged by too many close observers to be questioned as fact. Averell Harriman—close friend, wartime adviser, and envoy—writes: "He was determined, by establishing a close relationship with Stalin in wartime, to build confidence among the Kremlin leaders that Russia, now an acknowledged power, could trust the West . . . Churchill had a more pragmatic attitude . . . He turned pessimistic about the future earlier than Roosevelt and he foresaw greater difficulties at the end of the war."<sup>1</sup> So, it must be added, did Harriman himself.

George Kennan's view of Roosevelt's performance during the war is considerably harsher than Harriman's.<sup>2</sup> After commenting bitterly on the "inexcusable body of ignorance about the Russian Communist movement, about the history of its diplomacy, about what had happened in the purges, and about what had been going on in Poland and the Baltic States," Kennan turns more directly to FDR alone:

I also have in mind FDR's evident conviction that Stalin, while perhaps a somewhat difficult customer, was only, after all, a person like any other person; that the reason we hadn't been able to get along with him in the past was that we had never really had anyone with the proper personality and the

proper qualities of sympathy and imagination to deal with him, that he had been snubbed all along by the arrogant conservatives of the Western capitals; and that if only he could be exposed to the persuasive charms of someone like FDR himself, ideological preconceptions would melt and Russia's cooperation with the West could be easily arranged. For these assumptions there were no grounds whatsoever; and they were of a puerility that was unworthy of a statesman of FDR's stature.<sup>3</sup>

Churchill was not blameless during the first weeks following the Soviet entrance into the war. It was not necessary for him to hail so extravagantly the Soviet Union in its forced position—that of a “whipped dog,” said one commentator—as adversary of Hitler and ally of Britain and the United States. To say that “the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe” was nonsense and hardly mitigated by his follow-up that he would league himself with the devil in hell against the “filthy guttersnipe” Hitler.

Churchill was an old student of war and a particularly keen student of Communist Russia, which he had warned against ever since the Bolshevik Revolution. He knew, and Roosevelt should have known, the desperate position Stalin was in. His army had been proved ill-organized and ill-led in Finland; his equipment was scarce and often inferior. His political and moral record was not one bit better than Hitler's. He was as much the totalitarian as the Nazi leader was. He had joined Hitler only two years before as ally against the West. Why then welcome him now as long-lost democrat and freedom-fighter? He would have had to accept aid under any restrictions or conditions they chose to set down. Churchill was as much a part of the hysterical welcome to Stalin as was Roosevelt at the very beginning. But it can be said for Churchill what can never be said for Roosevelt in World War II: he got over his hysteria quickly and by late 1943 was aware, as Roosevelt never was once in the war, of just what kind of “ally” the Soviet Union

really was. Churchill tried throughout the war to apprise, to alert, Roosevelt to the Soviet menace that was growing daily out of the war against Hitler. To no avail.

“I know you will not mind my being brutally frank,” wrote Roosevelt to Churchill early in their alliance, “when I tell you that I can personally handle Stalin better than either your Foreign Office or my State Department. Stalin hates the guts of all your people. He thinks he likes me better, and I hope he will continue to.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt was being boastful, of course, but in the very act of boasting being also fatuous and credulous, to say the least. He knew nothing really about European, much less Soviet, affairs. He had never met Stalin or shown much interest in him throughout the 1930s, when Stalin was engaged in liquidating, purging, and exterminating. He had shown no interest in Soviet affairs, beyond giving diplomatic recognition to the Soviets shortly after he was first elected; nor, for that matter, much interest in any foreign affairs during two terms of office. China and the Pacific seemed to engage more of his interest than Europe; certainly this had been the case prior to about 1940. What could possibly explain, then, so arrant a claim to mastery of one of the two most formidable dictators in the world?

Very probably it was a visit to Moscow made by Roosevelt's closest and most trusted aide, Harry Hopkins, at the president's direction in July 1941. Roosevelt had written Stalin to ask that he treat Hopkins with the same degree of candor and fullness of thought that he would Roosevelt himself. Stalin was only too happy to do so. His embassy in Washington had informed him of the unique bond between the president and Hopkins. It was closer than that between Wilson and Colonel House in the First World War.

Stalin needed no further request. The red carpet was unrolled for Hopkins as though he were a head of state, and he was fêted accordingly. Stalin talked frankly to Hopkins about his need for vast quantities of war supplies, his hope that the United States would join the Soviets in

their war against Hitler, in which case they could have their own autonomous units and their own commanders. Repeatedly he pressed upon Hopkins his conviction that President Roosevelt had greater influence upon the common man in the world than anyone else alive. It was vital to have his influence at work actively in the war against Hitler.<sup>5</sup>

Over several hours of confidential talks—with no one but the interpreter present—Stalin and Hopkins had an opportunity to review the whole picture of the war. In reply to Hopkins's request, Stalin gave him a detailed account of exactly the kinds of weapons, vehicles, and planes the Soviets needed from America and Britain. He expressed his personal confidence that the Soviet soldiers could hold the German troops back from overrunning Moscow and Leningrad. Naturally, Stalin made it plain, however, that direct military assistance to the Soviet Union on the Western front, however arranged, was imperative at the earliest possible moment. Above all, the quantity and the speed of Anglo-American military aid to the Soviet Union were crucial to Russian success.

Hopkins was deeply impressed. His long report of his talks with Stalin, given to the president upon Hopkins's return, concluded with some striking personal impressions of Stalin:

Not once did he repeat himself. He talked as he knew his troops were shooting—straight and hard. He smiled warmly. There was no waste of word, gesture, nor mannerism. It was like talking to a perfectly coordinated machine, an intelligent machine. Joseph Stalin knew what he wanted, knew what Russia wanted, and he assumed that you knew. . . . He said good-by once just as only once he said hello. And that was that. Perhaps I merely imagined that his smile was more friendly, a bit warmer. . . .

No man could forget the picture of the dictator of Russia as he stood watching me leave—an austere, rugged, determined figure in boots that shone like mirrors, stout baggy trousers, and snug-fitting blouse. . . . He curries no favor with you. He seems to have no doubts. He assures you that Russia

will stand against the onslaughts of the German army. He takes it for granted that you have no doubts either. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Roosevelt did not have any; not after Hopkins's glowing report. Hopkins's entranced mind became Roosevelt's. As James McGregor Burns has pointed out about Hopkins: "He had almost an extra-sensory perception of Roosevelt's moods; he knew how to give advice in the form of flattery and flattery in the form of advice; he sensed when to press his boss and when to desist, when to talk and when to listen, when to submit and when to argue."<sup>7</sup> Hopkins was, of course, the perfect ideal-type of the American liberal-progressive in the 1930s—and after. A social worker initially, he was an early recruit to the New Deal, where he clearly found his Promised Land. He could adopt the pose of the playboy at the race tracks whose deepest, most consuming passion was the welfare of the common people, for whom he would gladly tax and tax and spend and spend. It was an effective pose; he was invited by Roosevelt to live in the White House in 1940; there he became without much question the president's *éminence grise*, almost constant companion, and ever-ready envoy.

For Roosevelt, after Hopkins's return from the Kremlin, the first order of the day was the immediate enlargement and expediting of Russian lend-lease. Prior to Hopkins's report, Roosevelt had been cautious about offending a substantial number of Americans who disliked godless Russia and were cold to its support even in the war against Hitler. Now the president threw caution aside. He appointed a high official whose sole responsibility was Russian lend-lease and who could report to the president directly. He told his cabinet, speaking specifically to Stimson, that he was "sick and tired" of excuses and from now on wanted to know what was on the water moving, not what was merely scheduled.<sup>8</sup>

Unhappily, the religious odium of the Soviets refused to go away. A very large number of Americans were deeply trou-

bled by Soviet denial of religious freedom. Roosevelt tried to persuade the pope to persuade American Catholics to drop their objections to aid to Russia. He also took a hand in working up a list of a thousand Protestant theologians and clergy calling for full aid to the Soviets. Finally, he even adopted the stratagem of insisting that, appearances in the Russian Constitution notwithstanding, the Soviets did have religious freedom. Robert Dallek writes:

Roosevelt knew full well there was no freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. Nor was he blind to the fact that he could extend Lend-Lease to Russia without demonstrating her devotion to religious freedom. But his concern to associate the Soviets with this democratic principle extended beyond the question of aid to the problem of American involvement in the war. Convinced that only a stark contrast between freedom and totalitarianism would provide the emotional wherewithal for Americans to fight, Roosevelt wished to identify the Russians regardless of Soviet realities with Anglo-American ideals as fully as he could. The effort to depict the Soviet Union as reformed, or reforming, on the issue of religious freedom was chiefly an expression of this concern.<sup>9</sup>

In this sadly misplaced effort, Roosevelt was of course violating every iota of Kennan's warning, on June 23, 1941, to the State Department from Berlin.

Roosevelt appears to have charmed himself eventually into belief that Stalin's nature partook of the religious. After returning from the Yalta conference in early 1945, he described Stalin to his cabinet as having "something else in him besides this revolutionist, Bolshevik thing." The president thought it might have something to do with his early training for the "priesthood." "I think that something entered into his nature of the way in which a Christian gentleman should behave."<sup>10</sup> There is no record, unfortunately, of the faces of the cabinet members who were listening.

Roosevelt's passion to please Stalin at all costs reached even the extremely dangerous waters of the Arctic Ocean and convoys to Archangel and Murmansk. The first obvious disagreements between

Churchill and Roosevelt in their correspondence were rooted in the contrasting views the two leaders took of the horrifying casualties in men and ships and materiel which were exacted by Nazi planes, submarines, and surface vessels. Churchill, following Admiralty advice, wanted to cut down on the number of convoys until safer arrangements could perhaps be arranged. Roosevelt was disinclined and through Hopkins sent an urgent telegram to Churchill to the contrary. He wanted shipments *increased* in number and size. Stalin, needless to say, responded nastily to any thought of cutting down on his lend-lease, no matter what the casualty rate might be. His own naval experts, he said, saw nothing to be concerned by.

Matters continued to worsen; on July 14, 1942, Churchill wrote Roosevelt that only four ships out of a convoy of thirty-three had reached Archangel, that Allied shipping losses for one recent week had reached 400,000 tons, "a rate unexampled in either this war or the last, and if maintained evidently beyond all existing replacement plans." Roosevelt was still seemingly untroubled; all that was important was getting what was possible to the Soviets. Not until his own naval adviser, Admiral King, looked into the British Admiralty reports and threw his personal weight behind them, did the president relent. He was not happy, though. He wrote Churchill that he was troubled by possible "political repercussions" and "even more that our supplies will not reach them promptly." "We have always got to bear in mind the personality of our ally," he wrote Churchill; "we should try to put ourselves in his place."<sup>11</sup>

Another matter on which Roosevelt and Churchill differed that involved Stalin's desires and demands was the creation of a second front on the French coast across the English Channel from Britain. There was no disagreement whatever so far as a cross-Channel front as such was concerned; that was as much a part of British strategy as American. It was the timing that was crucial. The British remembered Dunkirk only too well, and, after August

1942, their Dieppe invasion—experiment on the northern coast of France, one in which more than 5,000 British and Canadian soldiers were thrown back with 70 percent casualties in total defeat. They did not see how a second front across the Channel was possible until a huge build-up in England of soldiers, landing craft, weapons, planes, floating harbors, and the like made it realistically possible. Churchill knew very well how solidly and massively the Nazis were emplaced across the water—itself one of the most treacherous and storm-beset bodies in the world. And he knew that failure would be a devastating experience, one more than likely fatal to the Anglo-American war effort.

Roosevelt was impervious to British counsel. Stalin demanded a second front across the Channel in 1942, and Roosevelt did the same. When he sent Hopkins and Marshall to London in early 1942 for their first full conference with British counterparts, it was with instructions not to discuss but to press for such a front in later 1942. Whatever his real feelings might have been, General Marshall went along with his commander in chief. It was with only great reluctance and presumably apology to Stalin that Roosevelt relented on his demand for a second front in 1942, a demand, needless to say, that the Communist parties of Britain and the United States were pushing ardently and clamorously—their total opposition to the war against Hitler less than a year ago now a thing banished from the mind.

Roosevelt, having given up on 1942, now turned his full authority and eloquence to 1943—first early in the year, then the middle, finally the end. All the while Stalin—whose bare existence as a genuine adversary of Hitler owed almost everything to Britain and the United States—never hesitated to pin the white feather on Churchill, to accuse him of lack of true commitment to the war against Hitler for his refusal to be catapulted into a premature invasion of the Continent.

Today, looking back on D Day, June 6, 1944, and thinking of the astronomical numbers of men and weapons required

and the sheer luck also needed, as things turned out, one can only marvel that Roosevelt and his American chiefs could have been as ignorantly opinionated as they were about an earlier second front. The answer, of course, is largely Roosevelt's courtship of Stalin. Politics and ideology, not strict military strategy, became sovereign.<sup>12</sup>

This courtship was not long in becoming obvious to both British and Americans. One of the latter, William Bullitt, an old friend, and Roosevelt's ambassador, first to Russia in the early 1930s, then to France through the outbreak of the war, did his best to steer Roosevelt away from his uncritical, unconditional adulation and generosity. In a long and detailed letter in early 1943, Bullitt suggested "more of the old technique of the donkey, the carrot, and the club" to the president. But Roosevelt was unmoved. That letter, with its detail of both political and military brief, has been called by George Kennan "among the major historical documents of the time...unique in the insights it brought."<sup>13</sup> Once, according to Bullitt's recollection in 1948, he made the same suggestion to the president in conversation. The reply was: "I think that if I give him [Stalin] everything I possibly can, and ask nothing from him in return, *noblesse oblige*, he won't try to annex anything, and will work with me for a world of peace and democracy."<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt became almost obsessed, after Hopkins's magical visit to the Kremlin, by the thought of a visit of his own with Stalin, one without Churchill, without staffs, one simply for the purpose of a "meeting of minds" between the two of them. He was certain that "he was more likely to charm Stalin than Churchill." Sir John Wheeler-Bennett has written of his desire for such a meeting.<sup>15</sup> At last, on May 5, 1943, Roosevelt wrote a very special letter to Stalin, one that would be carried to the marshal by a personal envoy whom, as Roosevelt well knew, Stalin liked and had the utmost confidence in.

The envoy was Joseph E. Davies, who had been Roosevelt's ambassador to the



Soviet Union for a brief period ending in 1939. One reason, it should be noted, that Roosevelt wanted Davies to bear his invitation to Stalin was that the current ambassador, Admiral Standley, had recently angered Roosevelt by some remarks to the press that suggested his impatience with Soviet surliness and utter want of appreciation of American lend-lease. Davies was therefore ideal. After all, his *Mission to Moscow* was something of a best seller, as was, especially, the Hollywood movie made of the book, an even more extravagant idyll of Soviet humanitarianism than the book, one in which Stalin, Molotov, and others became surrogates of the American Founding Fathers. For Davies almost everything in the Soviet Union in the 1930s was milk and honey; he knew of no liquidation of kulaks, no Soviet murders by the thousands of Old Bolsheviks; the Moscow trials for Davies were all on the up and up, dealing with real traitors. It is no wonder Davies was greeted warmly and with royal attention. The main banquet in his honor was featured by the movie of *Mission to Moscow*, a copy of which Davies just happened to have brought with him on his joyous return to Moscow.

"In his letter to Stalin," Wheeler-Bennett writes, "Roosevelt made it quite clear that he wanted it *tête-à-tête* with the Russian leader. Mr. Churchill was not to be present. The president had urged that the meeting should be informal and free from 'the difficulties . . . of the red tape of diplomatic conversations.' It was to be a 'meeting of minds.' It was hoped that the meeting could be arranged for July or August.

"Stalin does not seem to have reacted with enormous enthusiasm to the suggestion of a purely bilateral meeting, although President Roosevelt felt obliged to tell Mr. Churchill that the initiative for such an exclusive arrangement *had come from the Russians*."<sup>16</sup>

As it happened, Churchill was at that very time engaged in one of his hottest, most strenuous altercations with Stalin, who had just fired another of his charges of cowardice and faint-heartedness at the

prime minister over the Western second front.

Not until late November 1943, did Roosevelt get at last his dreamed-of private "meeting of minds" with Stalin. The wait was worth it, for he got three such meetings—at the Teheran conference and in the Soviet embassy. By use of a purely contrived report by the Soviets that there was imminent danger of a Nazi parachute-assassination attempt, Roosevelt was persuaded by the Russians to occupy a suite in the Soviet embassy in Teheran rather than either the American or the British. The security, he was told, would be much better, as indeed it was from one point of view, that of the NKVD in full attendance as "servants" and "technicians."

The first of the private sessions between Roosevelt and Stalin took place just before the first plenary session.<sup>17</sup> Only Stalin's and Roosevelt's personal interpreters were permitted in the room. Roosevelt's was Charles E. Bohlen, on his way to a diplomatic career, with a near-perfect command of Russian, and the official American interpreter for the whole conference. Harmony ruled from the outset. Stalin, impressively courteous throughout, asked the president to feel free to bring up any subject he chose. And this Roosevelt did, throughout three intimate meetings.

Poland was extensively dealt with; it was not long or difficult to reach a complete meeting of minds on Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe. Roosevelt had what can most charitably be called a blind spot for East Europeans. He had informed Beaverbrook that he favored a plan for rounding up all dispossessed Europeans and sending them to Central Africa after the war. He also assured Churchill's adviser that boundaries were not really of concern to those people, that all that mattered was security and employment.<sup>18</sup> When a Hyde Park visitor mentioned the growing alarm of the Poles, in Europe and in America, about their future, Roosevelt replied: "I know it. I am sick and tired of these people. . . . I'm not sure that a fair plebiscite, if ever there was such a thing,

wouldn't show that these eastern provinces would prefer to go back to Russia. Yes, I really think those 1941 frontiers are as just as any."<sup>19</sup>

There was thus no predisposition on Roosevelt's part to try to block Soviet plans for Poland. He was quite agreeable to the cartographic lifting of Poland and setting it down a few hundred miles to the west, and thus giving Russia the parts of eastern Poland it wanted. Roosevelt did ask for one concession. He explained that he was probably going to run for a fourth term in the next year, 1944, and if so he would need the votes of the millions of Polish-Americans. Could Stalin therefore remain publicly silent about this agreement until after the election? Stalin indicated that he could. Wheeler-Bennett observes: "Roosevelt's words were of tremendous importance. On the one hand they virtually guaranteed to Stalin the territorial prizes he had been seeking in Eastern Poland. On the other, they removed all necessity for the Soviet Union to make its peace with the Polish government."<sup>20</sup>

There was little of genuine significance to the war and the postwar circumstances that was not dealt with by Stalin and Roosevelt in their three private sessions. They agreed on the very earliest possible cross-Channel second front as well as on a diversionary operation, so called, in the south of France, to be manned by divisions transferred from Italy. When Japan was brought up by the president, Stalin agreed that after a brief period of rest following Hitler's surrender, the Soviets would join the Pacific war. Roosevelt made evident that there would be generous territorial prizes for the Soviet Union. It was agreed that France should be reduced to a third-rate power and its empire scattered. Stalin did not want possible French challenges to his anticipated power over Western as well as Eastern Europe. Roosevelt seems to have had no other reason beyond personal dislike of de Gaulle and suspicion of French morality and culture. Roosevelt introduced his Wilsonian dream—a United Nations organization

after the war, one worldwide in scope. Stalin looked doubtful until the president assured him of his hope that it would be governed in fact by "the four policemen" of the world—the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and China, with the first two the great superpowers.

India came up, thanks to Roosevelt. He warned Stalin that Churchill was "prickly" on the subject. He, FDR, proposed "reform from the bottom, along the Soviet line." Bohlen was aghast at hearing the president exhibit such ignorance of the nature of the Bolshevik revolution—as far removed from a "bottom-up" revolution as anyone might imagine.<sup>21</sup> Stalin himself, who by this time could only have been satisfied that in Roosevelt he had a benign dunce, at least in military and peace strategy, for a companion, observed immediately, and somewhat drily, that India was a "complicated problem" and furthermore (Could Stalin's eye have had a twinkle?) that such drastic reform just might entail revolution.

Roosevelt and Stalin reached essential understanding in their three private meetings on all the main topics on the agenda for the official sessions. Churchill was not blind to what was going on; he begged Roosevelt for a private session, but once again Roosevelt pleaded his fear that if the two of them met privately, Stalin might become discouraged and suspicious. The result of the private meetings was to convert the public sessions into little more than sharp exchanges between Stalin and Churchill, with Roosevelt sitting mute a good deal of the time. Bohlen later wrote: "I did not like the attitude of the President, who not only backed Stalin but seemed to enjoy the Stalin-Churchill exchange. Roosevelt should have come to the defense of a close friend and ally, who was really being put upon by Stalin."<sup>22</sup>

Far from that, however, Roosevelt seems to have relished the confrontation and even hatched a little scene in which he could demonstrate to Stalin his feelings about Churchill. As he described it later to Frances Perkins back in Washington, he pretended, just as the official session be-

gan, to whisper loudly in Stalin's ear to the effect that "Winston is cranky this morning, he got up on the wrong side of the bed. A vague smile passed over Stalin's eyes. . . . I began to tease Churchill about his Britishness, about John Bull. . . . Winston got red and scowled and the more he did so, the more Stalin smiled. Finally Stalin broke into a deep guffaw, and for the first time in three days, I saw the light. I kept it up until Stalin was laughing with me, and it was then I called him 'Uncle Joe.'"<sup>23</sup>

Keith Eubank, commenting on this extraordinary episode, writes: "If his tale is true, Roosevelt had insulted Churchill, who admired him, and demeaned himself before Stalin, who trusted neither man. In his craving for Stalin's approval and friendship, Roosevelt imagined the joke had been on Churchill and that Stalin had laughed with him. More probably Stalin had laughed at the President of the United States belittling an ally to find favor with a tyrant."<sup>24</sup>

All in all, it was a virtuoso performance for Stalin. There was little of the slightest strategic or geopolitical value to him that he did not nail down at Teheran or else put within easy position for action later. Hopkins had told Sir Alexander Cadogan on the way over that "you will find us lining up with the Russians."<sup>25</sup> At the end Admiral King said: "Stalin knew just what he wanted when he came to Teheran, and he got it."<sup>26</sup> At the very beginning of the conference, General Brooke told Cadogan: "This conference is over when it has just begun. Stalin has the President in his pocket."<sup>27</sup>

The notorious Yalta conference came a little over a year later. Once again it was Stalin who set the time and place. Churchill said that if ten years' research had been done, "we couldn't have found a worse place in the world than Yalta." The NKVD, uniforms often showing under the assumed clothing of servants and technicians, were everywhere. Despite the outcry after the war about Yalta, it really did little more than to reaffirm, this time in writing, what Teheran had produced with

respect to Poland, its boundaries, its coming election, its Soviet-created Lublin government, the status of Russian relations with the Baltic and the Balkan states, the United Nations with the special representation in the Assembly allowed the Soviet Union, and the expansive, specifically designated areas of the Far East that would go to Stalin for his willingness to join the Anglo-American war against Japan—once the European war was safely and securely ended, of course. All in all, as Professor Eubank describes in detail, Yalta was more ceremony and reaffirmation than it was new substance. Teheran—most especially its three private Roosevelt-Stalin meetings—had done all the real work.<sup>28</sup>

Roosevelt and Stalin enjoyed a reunion. This time Stalin met alone with Churchill once, but clearly the zest was in further meetings with Roosevelt. Again, as at Teheran, Roosevelt shied away from any danger of being thought by Stalin to be ganging up with Churchill against him. "The Teheran format was repeated," writes Eubank; "Stalin waited for Roosevelt to bring topics up for discussion. Yet to Roosevelt this was a meeting of old friends who had met previously and corresponded ever since. At Yalta they were only renewing old contacts."<sup>29</sup>

Churchill had known from the Teheran conference that he was out of it, really. In his characteristic, impish way, he described his position to an old friend as that of a little donkey, alone knowing the way, but caught between the Russian bear and the American buffalo. There were times during the year following Teheran when it was feared that Churchill might even resign as prime minister over differences in military and political strategy with Roosevelt and the American chiefs. But General Brooke seems to have persuaded Churchill to imbibe some of his own philosophy toward the Americans: "All right, if you insist upon being damned fools, sooner than fall out with you, which would be fatal, we shall be damned fools with you, and we shall see that we perform the role of damned fools damned well."



Thus armed philosophically, Churchill could endure more of Yalta folly than he might otherwise have been able to: for example, Roosevelt's assurance to Stalin, in Churchill's hearing, that all U.S. troops would be out of Europe within two years<sup>30</sup>; Roosevelt's chilly rejection of Churchill's proposal for a European Emergency High Commission to superintend Polish elections and the formation of a new government, saving Stalin the necessity of a word against the idea; and the almost wanton showering upon the Soviets of Far Eastern territorial treasures for Stalin's agreement to join the Pacific war. In substance, all of this had been done at Teheran more than a year before.

"In the end," writes Eubank, "Yalta became more notorious because this conference produced written documents which seemed to prove betrayal of Poland, a deal with Stalin over Eastern Europe, and a written pact over the Far East that changed the balance of power."<sup>31</sup> Additionally, there was the vaunted Declaration on Liberated Europe, solemnly signed by the Big Three at Yalta, in which assurances were duly registered of forthcoming democracies all over Eastern Europe.

Stalin did not acquire Eastern Europe from Yalta, for he had already occupied it by force during the months following Teheran. The true crime of Yalta is the legal and moral capital it gave Stalin—to draw on in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

Churchill recovered quickly from his immediate post-Yalta delirium; within a matter of days he was back at work alerting, advising, warning, and beseeching Roosevelt on the rising threat to the postwar world that the Soviet Union was becoming. For his part the president, it may be fairly said, had been no different at Yalta or after Yalta than he had been for a long time, since at least Teheran, with respect to Stalin and the Soviets. He had made a habit of counseling patience or providing justification for most of what the Soviets did. In one instance only did he depart from his norm. That was when Stalin, in a tone of rude insult, accused the president

and the prime minister of participating in a scheme hatched in Bern, Switzerland, of effecting a special, negotiated surrender of the German military forces. Roosevelt drafted the telegram of denial and outrage, and Churchill commended him. It is hard to avoid the feeling that mixed in with the statesman's outrage is a tincture of a lover's feeling of betrayal.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the Bern incident, the exchange of letters between the two leaders after Yalta is a largely faithful mirror of their sharply contrasting attitudes on Stalin and on the politics of the Soviet Union. On March 8 Churchill sent to Roosevelt a detailed listing of the specific derelictions of the Soviets, with special emphasis on Poland. He recommended strongly a direct confrontation by the two of them, enclosing a draft telegram to Stalin. Roosevelt's reply was: "I very much hope . . . that you will not send any message to Uncle Joe at this juncture—especially as I feel that certain parts of your proposed text might produce a reaction quite contrary to your intent." To which Churchill responded: "Which parts?" "We might be able to improve the wording, but I am convinced that unless we can induce the Russians to agree to these fundamental points of procedure, all our work at Yalta will be in vain." Churchill also indicated that he must shortly appear before Parliament. "I do not wish to reveal a divergence between the British and United States governments, but it would certainly be necessary for me to make it clear that we are now in the presence of a great failure and an utter breakdown of . . . Yalta."

In his response on March 15, Roosevelt made a show of indignation that Churchill should think their two countries to be in divergence: "From our side there is certainly no evidence of divergence of policy. We have merely been discussing the most effective tactics and I cannot agree that we are confronted with a breakdown of the Yalta agreement."

On April 5 Churchill wrote a very fireball of a letter to Roosevelt on Soviet behavior. It called for a "firm and blunt stand"

without delay, and it concluded with the pregnant words: "If they are ever convinced that we are afraid of them and can be bullied into submission, then indeed I should despair of our future relations with them and much else." Roosevelt's reply was written by Admiral Leahy for his signature. It suggests concurrence with Churchill's position. But Professor Kimball, editor of the *Correspondence*, correctly writes: "So cryptic a message as this does not mean that the President had finally accepted the idea of a postwar Soviet threat and was advocating an early

form of military containment. . . . One wonders if the President gave this message any consideration at all."<sup>33</sup>

Roosevelt's true feeling was written in his own hand on April 11, the day before he died: "I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day and most of them straighten out as in the case of the Bern meeting. We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct."

(To be concluded)

<sup>1</sup>Averell Harriman, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin* (New York, 1975), p. 170. <sup>2</sup>George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston, 1960), chap. 23 *passim*. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 355. <sup>4</sup>Churchill and Roosevelt: *The Complete Correspondence*, ed. Warren F. Kimball (Princeton, 1984). Roosevelt to Churchill, March 18, 1942. Kimball comments: "The President's belief that he could 'personally handle' Stalin lasted until Roosevelt's death." Vol. 1, p. 420. <sup>5</sup>Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York, 1948), chap. 15. <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 343-44. <sup>7</sup>Cited in Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York, 1979), pp. 279-80. <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 280. <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 298. <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 521. <sup>11</sup>*Correspondence*. Churchill to Roosevelt, July 14, 1942; Roosevelt to Churchill, April 26 and July 29. <sup>12</sup>See Mark A. Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front . . . 1941-1943* (Westport, Conn., 1977). <sup>13</sup>*For the President: Personal and Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, ed. Orville E. Bullitt (Boston, 1972). Kennan's appreciation is contained in his laudatory introduction to the book. Bullitt's long letter to the president is dated January 29, 1943. <sup>14</sup>This well-known citation from Bullitt's conversation with Roosevelt in the White House appeared under Bullitt's name in an article in *Life* magazine, August 30, 1948. Its reliability has been questioned by some on the basis of the estrangement between Bullitt and the president over Sumner Welles. But Orville Bullitt refers (p. 554) to a book by

a French writer, Laslo Havas, *Assassinat au sommet*, in which the identical conversation reported by Bullitt in his article is described, even with some of the same Roosevelt phrases, by Havas. Most assuredly, there is no discrepancy between Roosevelt's spoken sentiment to Bullitt and his recorded behavior toward Stalin throughout the war. <sup>15</sup>Sir John Wheeler-Bennett and Anthony Nicholls, *The Semblance of Peace* (London, 1972), p. 81. <sup>16</sup>Wheeler-Bennett, pp. 81-82. (Emphasis added.) <sup>17</sup>My treatment of the private conversations is based on Keith Eubank's account in his *Summit at Teheran* (New York, 1985), which in turn is largely drawn from Charles E. Bohlen's official notes as Roosevelt's interpreter during the conversations. <sup>18</sup>Quoted in A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London, 1972), p. 397. Taylor adds: "The report which Beaverbrook brought back . . . revealed little but the strange workings of Roosevelt's mind." <sup>19</sup>Cited by Dallek, pp. 436-37. <sup>20</sup>Wheeler-Bennett, p. 162. <sup>21</sup>Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History* (New York, 1973), p. 141. <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146. <sup>23</sup>Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York, 1946), p. 84. <sup>24</sup>Eubank, p. 351. <sup>25</sup>Sir Alexander Cadogan, *Diaries* (New York, 1972), p. 581. <sup>26</sup>Eubank, p. 311. <sup>27</sup>Cadogan, p. 582. <sup>28</sup>Eubank, pp. 472 ff. <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 474. <sup>30</sup>Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston, 1953), p. 353. The Brooke words are cited by Kimball as commentary in *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 226. <sup>31</sup>Eubank, p. 479. <sup>32</sup>*Correspondence*. Churchill to Roosevelt, April 4, 1945. <sup>33</sup>Vol. 3, p. 617.

*"We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!"*

## *Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech: Forty Years After*

*John P. Rossi*

OCEANS OF INK have been spilled in an attempt to clarify the origins of the Cold War. Scholarly reputations have been made and destroyed in this intellectual war. Some scholars have sought the origins of the Cold War in the closing months of the Second World War as suspicion mounted between the Western Allies and Stalin's Russia. Others have looked to the months following the end of the war when the Soviet system slowly but inexorably closed over Eastern Europe. But for many Americans the event which dramatized the seriousness of the situation was a single dramatic speech—Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" address at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946. Rarely has one speech created a whole new political condition. While Churchill did not create the Cold War, he gave the amorphous condition plaguing relations between the free and Communist worlds a new dramatic image in his phrase about an Iron Curtain descending upon Europe.

It is said that timing in politics as in life is everything. Churchill's speech came at a moment when public opinion in America was undergoing one of those seismic shifts that infrequently occur in the state system. The pervasive and often unrealistic pro-Soviet sentiment that had characterized the United States during the war continued to run very high in the weeks

and months following the surrender of Germany. Public trust of Soviet intentions reached 54 percent positive in August 1945. A great deal of America's attention in these months centered on the newly organized United Nations. Expectations ran high that the UN would serve to soften differences between the Western nations and the Soviets. During these months there was a lot of brave talk about the UN as the world's last great hope for peace. Typical of this view was the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, one of the leading liberal newspapers in America. It described the UN as "our greatest stake in security for the future," an opinion shared by most enlightened progressives in America.

Beginning in the autumn of 1945 the first concrete signs that relations between East and West might prove difficult began to surface. The Soviets started to strip Germany of her industrial plants; Western newsmen as well as diplomats were banned from certain East European states controlled by the Soviet Union; Russian troops continued to occupy Northern Iran; and conditions in Poland made it clear that despite promises to the contrary the Soviets were going to establish a Communist regime in power. When the new secretary of state, the normally optimistic Jimmy Byrnes, went to London in September 1945 for a foreign ministers' conference, Foreign Minister Molotov of