

## **Remaking the World: Personal Diplomacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt with the Allies during the Second World War**

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### **Abstract**

This investigation examines visions, goals and realities facing the Great Powers in rebuilding the states of Europe at the end of the Second World War. The paper proposes to focus on the victorious Allied leaders, in particular Franklin Roosevelt's interaction with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, but may also bring in other perspectives (both winners and losers) as appropriate.

This exploration proposes to focus upon Roosevelt's personal efforts to shape 1) the political and economic models which were considered by Allied leaders; 2) how the military situation upon the ground affected the shifting and overall political settlement; 3) what role the historical context played amongst the thinking of Allied leaders; 4) how important the development of international organizations were in Roosevelt's diplomacy; 5) the differing viewpoints of the Allies towards traditional European diplomacy, especially regarding Eastern Europe; 6) how technology, particularly the development of the atomic bomb, affected conceptions of state-building; 7) how Roosevelt's early death affected the course of history regarding the settlement of the war and the rise of the Cold War.

Lastly, the paper will attempt to apply or comment upon the lessons of state-building and charismatic personal political leadership from the time period to the challenges of our modern world.

*“ . . . I must continue to assume that you have the same high confidence in my truthfulness and reliability that I have always had in yours.”*

Franklin D. Roosevelt to Joseph Stalin, April 4, 1945<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The Grand Alliance of the United States, Great Britain and Soviet Union which emerged victorious in the Second World War is notable for the extreme power concentrated in the hands of the Allied executive leaders, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin. These three reached a pinnacle of control of world affairs rarely seen in diplomatic history, and their dealings with each other on a personal level assume a greater magnification within their political relationships.

In the wake of the Cold War which emerged from the completion of the Second World War, President Roosevelt was criticized for his vanity and reliance upon personal diplomacy with his allies, in particular regarding his relations with Stalin. It should be noted that Roosevelt's personal diplomacy was not limited to Stalin, but that he also practiced it upon Winston Churchill; defenders of the President (and Prime Minister) can legitimately claim with concrete and great results.

President Roosevelt's correspondence with both Allied leaders has recently been comprehensively published and is widely accessible to the public. What does a reading of Roosevelt's correspondence tell us of the success or failure of his personal diplomacy in the realm of international affairs and the course of the war? Can personal relations make a

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<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/4/1945.

difference between leaders, and if so, how and where? Or does the national interest regarding security and economics always trump any personal glosses between individual politicians?

### **The Course of History: the Second World War**

It must be kept in mind at all times when attempting to evaluate Roosevelt's efforts that he made his decisions within the framework of war. The war was paramount: all three leaders recognized that before there could be any real postwar plans to be realized, the defeat of the Axis powers, in particular Hitlerite Germany, had to be accomplished in a complete and comprehensive manner. The trend of events which ranged from political decisions made by the Axis leaders to results on the battlefields, and hence beyond the immediate control of the Allied leadership, were the parameters within which they operated. Succinctly put, the general strategy of the Allies was to defeat Germany first, Japan second.

### **History as Actor: the Influence of the Past on the Allied Statesmen and their Postwar Visions**

History, or the presence of the past, can be seen to have two main angles of influence upon the Allied statesmen. One is in the personal relations between all three leaders, their personal histories with each other. The second is their individual understandings of the history of their nations and their role within the world, the intellectual capital upon which they conducted relations with each other.

Of the three, Roosevelt was the least imbued with a historical sense. This was partly because of his character as an American, a young nation with an orientation on the future, not the past. As a result, personal history tended to weigh more heavily with Roosevelt. This can be seen most immediately in his first letter to Winston Churchill on September 11, 1939, when he wrote the newly appointed First Lord of the Admiralty: "My Dear Churchill: It is because you and I occupied similar positions in the World War that I want you to know how glad I am that you are back again in the Admiralty," from which point he subsequently invited the Cabinet minister to maintain a direct correspondence with him, a head of state, and in a typical personal flourish ended with a complement on Churchill's biography of his own ancestor, the Duke of Marlboro.<sup>2</sup>

Roosevelt and Churchill proceeded to maintain an intimate and lively correspondence over the next five and half years of war; they exchanged nearly two thousand letters (Churchill wrote 1,161, Roosevelt 788). Their correspondence was not generally of a reflective nature. Roosevelt famously quoted Longfellow's poem that "Humanity with all its fears, With all the hope of future years, Is hanging breathless on thy fate," to Churchill<sup>3</sup> while England fought Germany alone and Roosevelt sought to keep the British afloat with his Lend-Lease program. Later on he wrote regarding a summit that he preferred "a comfortable oasis to the raft at Tilsit,"<sup>4</sup> referencing Napoleon and Alexander, but generally he did not use many historical references.

By comparison, Roosevelt and Stalin exchanged slightly over three hundred letters during the war (Roosevelt 166, Stalin 138). In spring 1942 through a letter presented to Stalin by Ambassador Standley, Roosevelt did make historical reference to the "traditional friendship between our two peoples, even before America became a nation. This reason is found in the character of the two peoples."<sup>5</sup> But the pattern of an action-oriented correspondence, not a reflective one, is maintained throughout the Roosevelt-Stalin correspondence.

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<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt to Churchill, 9/11/1939.

<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt to Churchill, 1/20/1941.

<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt to Churchill, 12/2/1942.

<sup>5</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/23/1942.

Roosevelt never did establish the intimacy of relations with Stalin that he achieved with Churchill, and again the course of the war was a major factor. It should not be forgotten that from August 1939 to June 1941, Stalin was officially allied with Hitler. During that two year frame, Roosevelt and Churchill cemented their relations, and even issued the Atlantic Charter in August 1941. This document was important as a joint statement of the shared democratic political values of the Anglo-Americans, and first established postwar expectations for the conquered peoples of Europe when the two statesmen declared that they “. . . respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”<sup>6</sup> Even after Hitler launched the Barbarossa invasion of June 22, 1941, at which time Churchill welcomed his Stalinist ally with the quip that “If Hitler invaded Hell I would at least make a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons,”<sup>7</sup> the full Allied effort in the war did not fall into place until December 1941 when the Japanese attacked the United States, and in support of his ally Hitler declared war on the United States. Hence, the prime correspondence between the Allied statesmen took place in the years 1942-45; these were the years that fully showcased Roosevelt’s efforts at a personal diplomacy.

Roosevelt’s sense of history largely came from his personal context: the historical lessons he took to heart came from two Presidents he knew closely. First was his cousin President Theodore Roosevelt, a New York Republican (served 1901-09), from whom Roosevelt absorbed lessons of military power and preparedness. Second was President Woodrow Wilson, a New Jersey Democrat (served 1913-21), in whose administration Roosevelt served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the Great War. Roosevelt believed that Wilson had not been militarily prepared to lead the United States into war against Germany in 1917, resulting in the negotiated Carthaginian peace at Versailles and seething German resentment which made Hitler’s rise possible. He also broadly agreed with Wilson over the desirability of a new international organization that might transcend the old European balance of power system. Roosevelt saw that this American faith in international cooperation, however, had limits. Wilson’s spectacular failure to bring the United States into the League of Nations, the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the League, and the internal system of collective security which did not recognize real differences in political, economic and military supremacy of the Great Powers within the League were all mistakes which Roosevelt was determined not to repeat at the end of the Second World War. Roosevelt’s international program was an outward projection of his personal and religious values and the political values of the American system of government, namely representative governance and individual liberties.<sup>8</sup>

By comparison, the two European statesmen, Stalin and Churchill, were more influenced by European diplomatic history and hence more inclined to acceptance of balance of power realities. They both acted upon their perceptions without Roosevelt’s input at crucial times. Stalin’s historical capital came out of his Marxist philosophy, but he was not a doctrinaire Marxist. Unlike Lenin, who believed that international communist revolution was imminent and inevitable after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Stalin recognized the world revolution envisioned by Marx had failed to materialize, and was willing to bend Marxism to fit circumstances in both domestic and international contexts. In the early 1920s Stalin set about

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<sup>6</sup> Roosevelt and Churchill, Atlantic Charter, 8/14/1941.

<sup>7</sup> John Lukacs, *Churchill: Visionary. Statesman. Historian.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> For an assessment of Roosevelt’s values, please see James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: the Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 549-550.

securing Socialism in One Country, and as head of the Nationalities department he developed his own version of a National Socialism. During the war, Stalin told the American Ambassador Averell Harriman that the communist world revolution envisioned by Marx was “inevitable,” but that he trusted the eventuality to history.<sup>9</sup> The keys to Stalin’s postwar goals were to first ensure Soviet survival and victory, and then to consolidate Soviet gains as opportunities appeared.

Churchill was by far the Ally most influenced and familiar with history; he made a long career in writing history. As opposed to the revolutionary leaders of the day, Churchill looked to the past as a guide concerning traditions and probabilities, not laws or deterministic systems. His familiarity with the past allowed him to recognize the revolutionary, new nature of Hitlerism; his familiarity with diplomatic history allowed him to perceive, arguably far before Roosevelt, how Stalin’s Russian nationalism would influence postwar events. Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin and Hitler all maintained philosophies of history, in either class or racial deterministic contexts; Churchill by contrast maintained a historical philosophy.<sup>10</sup> He understood the values of representative government and individual liberties which the British had founded in their American brethren and made them natural allies, and he proudly asserted the legacy of his nation. At one point during the war he wrote Roosevelt, “I make bold, however, to suggest that British imperialism has spread and is spreading democracy more widely than any other system of government since the beginning of time.”<sup>11</sup> But it should be noted that as American military and economic might made Roosevelt a power hinge between Churchill and Stalin during the war, so Great Britain and Churchill were a geographical hinge between the United States and Soviet Union for the postwar. Churchill looked not just west to America, but also east to Europe as part of the postwar world. He not only warned of Soviet encroachment with his Iron Curtain speech at Fulton, Missouri in 1946, but later that year in Zurich, Switzerland, laid the foundation stone for promotion of a European political identity.

### **Roosevelt’s Personal Diplomacy: Defeating Germany First**

Roosevelt launched his personal diplomacy with Stalin as soon as the United States formally became an ally in the fight against Hitler in December 1941. He had already cleared the way for Soviet eligibility for Lend Lease aid after the Barbarossa invasion. An initial shipment plan of a billion dollars and no interest for the Soviet government was accompanied with a casual request that “I trust you will not hesitate to get in touch with me directly should the occasion require it;”<sup>12</sup> and within four months he doubled the aid to two billion dollars<sup>13</sup> (incidentally, this was the same amount of money the United States would spend on the Manhattan Project). But his personal charm offensive on Stalin really began in his message of December 14, 1941, in which Roosevelt first pressed for a personal meeting, acknowledged the primacy of the war against Hitler, and hinted at longer-range plans, arguing that preparation was necessary “. . . not merely for the next few weeks but also for the permanent defeat of Hitlerism. I very much wish that you and I could meet to talk this over personally.”<sup>14</sup> But he acknowledged that this was impossible at the time. Roosevelt would spend two years pursuing Stalin for a personal meeting.

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<sup>9</sup> See Susan Butler, *My Dear Mr. Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Churchill as historian, see Lukacs, p. 101-128.

<sup>11</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 5/21/1944.

<sup>12</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 10/30/1941.

<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 2/12/1942.

<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/14/1941.

But the relationship with Stalin would be difficult throughout 1942-43 because of the issue of a cross channel invasion to create a second front in Europe, which the Soviet leader vehemently insisted upon to the extent that he cast aspersions on the Anglo-American war effort. When Churchill went to Moscow in August 1942 to reassure and confer with Stalin, the subject of the Pacific War was discussed. Roosevelt wrote to Stalin “. . . I know *very well* that our real enemy is Germany and that our force and power must be brought against Hitler at the earliest possible moment. You can be sure that this will be done, *just as soon as it is humanly possible to put together the transportation.*”<sup>15</sup> (italics in original). Later on, Roosevelt visited the subject of priority again, commenting that the swiftest way to victory against Japan was first to defeat the Nazis with the reassurance that “. . . you and Churchill and I are in complete agreement on this.”<sup>16</sup> When Churchill and Roosevelt met at Casablanca in January 1943, Roosevelt declared that “unconditional surrender” was the official Allied policy because he knew that the Anglo-Americans were not fully poised to make a massive cross-channel invasion due to the heavy shipping losses in the Atlantic. By March 1943, Stalin emphasized that a second front in France was paramount for the Soviet war effort, and concluded that “I appreciate the considerable difficulties caused by a shortage of transportation facilities, of which you advised me in your message. Nevertheless, I think I must give a most emphatic warning, in the interest of our common cause, of the grave danger with which further delay in opening a second front in France is fraught.”<sup>17</sup> The summer of 1943 probably saw the low ebb in relations amongst the Allies when it was confirmed that a cross channel invasion of France would not be occurring in 1943. Stalin wrote the President in June 1943 that “As to the Soviet Government, it does not find it possible to agree with this decision, made, besides, without its participation and without attempt to discuss jointly this most important question, and which decision may result in grave consequences for the future progress of the war.”<sup>18</sup> Stalin went even further two weeks later, writing after Roosevelt’s attempt at a conciliatory letter, “You write to me that you fully understand my disappointment. I have to tell you that this not simply a matter of disappointment of the Soviet Government, but a matter of preservation of its confidence in the Allies which confidence is subjected to hard trials.”<sup>19</sup> Stalin’s charge that he had been left out of the loop is ironic in that Roosevelt had pursued him assiduously for a meeting and it was Stalin who consistently declined in this period. However, this situation spurred the first face to face summit meeting of the three Allies at Tehran.

### **Roosevelt’s Personal Diplomacy: Tehran, November 1943**

Roosevelt and Churchill met face to face on seven separate occasions, often for weeks at a time; for just one example, Churchill lodged at the White House for over three weeks over Christmas 1942. The Allies only met as a threesome twice; the first meeting would finally come at Tehran.

Roosevelt had first requested a personal meeting in December 1941, and continued throughout the period to repeat his request with a personal emphasis. In April 1942 he informed Stalin that “a meeting of minds in personal conversation” was needed because “I need your advice before we determine with finality the strategic course of our common military action.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 8/18/1942.

<sup>16</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 11/19/1942.

<sup>17</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 3/16/1943.

<sup>18</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 6/11/1943.

<sup>19</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 6/24/1943.

<sup>20</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/11/1942.

In July 1942, Roosevelt wrote that “It is still a matter of deep regret to me that thus far the pressure of events has rendered it impossible for us to meet and personally discuss various matters vitally affecting the common interests of the United States and the Soviet Union.”<sup>21</sup> Thus he poured forth in early December 1942: “The more I consider our mutual military situation and the necessity for reaching early strategic decisions the more I am persuaded that you, Churchill and I should have an early meeting. . . . My most compelling reason is that I am very anxious to have a talk with you. . . . I do hope that you will consider this proposal favorably because I can see no other way of reaching the vital strategic decisions which should be made by all of us together.”<sup>22</sup> Typical of Stalin’s responses during this entire time was his reply of December 14, in which he expressed “deep regret” but a meeting could not take place because “Front business absolutely prevents it, demanding my constant presence near the troops.”<sup>23</sup>

Stalin liked to give the impression that he was constantly in contact with and command of the Soviet armies, although in truth he only visited the front once during the entire war, generally spending his time in between the Kremlin and his dacha. Stymied at every turn, by May 1943 Roosevelt went so far as to propose to Stalin, without informing Churchill, that the two of them meet within the personal diplomacy of complete insiders: “I want to get away from the difficulties of large Staff conferences or the red tape of diplomatic conversations. Therefore, the simplest and most practical method I can think of would be an informal and completely simple visit for a few days between you and me.”<sup>24</sup> Given Stalin’s silent treatment to the issue of a meeting and after his anger in summer 1943 over the lack of a second front, Roosevelt was still querying by July: “I hope to hear from you very soon about the other matter which I *still* feel to be of great importance *to you and me.*”<sup>25</sup> (italics in original).

But with the Allied operations in Sicily and Italy in latter 1943, a thaw in Stalin began to set in. Churchill had anticipated this, writing to Roosevelt in June 1943: “The castigation we have both received from Uncle Joe under the date of June 11<sup>th</sup> was naturally to be expected in view of the inevitable course of events governing our decisions. In my opinion the best answer will be to knock Italy out of the war and let him feel the relief which will come to him thereby. I quite understand their vexation, though they cannot understand the facts that dominate our action.”<sup>26</sup> As early as August 1942, Roosevelt and Churchill had taken to referring to Stalin as “Uncle Joe” in their correspondence, a habit they did not divulge to Stalin.<sup>27</sup>

By September, haggling commenced in earnest over a meeting place and date, with Roosevelt eventually agreeing to Tehran when it was arranged that Congressional legislation could be delivered to him by air from that location; it was also in recognition that Stalin could not be budged any further away. Roosevelt confided to Stalin (and copied to Churchill), “I am placing a very great importance on the personal and intimate conversations which you and Churchill and I will have, for on them the hope of the future world will greatly depend.”<sup>28</sup> At the Moscow conference of foreign ministers in late October 1943, the Anglo-Americans unveiled details of their plan for the cross channel invasion of France, operation Overlord, convincing the

<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 7/20/1942.

<sup>22</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/2/1942.

<sup>23</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 12/14/1942.

<sup>24</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 5/5/1943.

<sup>25</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 7/15/1943.

<sup>26</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 6/12/1943.

<sup>27</sup> See Churchill to Roosevelt, 8/4/1942.

<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 10/14/1943.

Soviets the invasion would proceed in 1944. In response, Stalin admitted that the threat of a second front had helped the Soviet army during the previous summer by forcing the Germans to allocate forces away from the Eastern front.<sup>29</sup> For the first time, Stalin committed to the Pacific war, informing Roosevelt that “The Soviet Government has studied the situation in the Far East and has decided that immediately after the end of the war in Europe, when the Allies have defeated Hitler’s Germany, it will come out against Japan.”<sup>30</sup> Roosevelt was desperate to meet but deeply concerned with his Constitutional duties, pleading with Stalin to move the meeting place as late as October 21: “Pray do not fail me in this crisis.”<sup>31</sup> But after the Moscow conference, by November 8, Roosevelt cabled Stalin that he had solved the air travel problem, and “Therefore, I have decided to go to Tehran and this makes me especially happy.”<sup>32</sup>

The Tehran summit of late November 1943 was the high point of Allied cooperation and Roosevelt’s war strategy. He had kept both Britain and the Soviet Union fighting through the American Lend-Lease supply lines; he had managed a difficult alliance for two years that had committed to a war strategy of Germany first, Japan second. Execution would be the key in 1944; but victory would start to come into sight in that year, and with approaching victory, Roosevelt could begin to focus upon the postwar world. Given that his main goals beyond the defeat of Germany could be deeply aided by the Soviet Union (defeat of Japan) or required their political participation in his eyes (Soviet membership in postwar international economic and labor arrangements, most importantly leading to Soviet participation in a postwar international security organization), Roosevelt was keen to use his personal influence to shore up Soviet support. And this meant the seduction of Stalin, at a cost to his personal relationship with Churchill.

Roosevelt appeared to innocently query Stalin, “Where do you think we should live?”<sup>33</sup> in order to gain lodgings and Russian trust by placing himself and the American delegation as guests of the Stalin and the Soviet government at the Tehran conference. The events of the conference have much discussed by diplomatic historians, and represent the high-point of Roosevelt’s charm offensive with Stalin. He appeared to assume a familiarity and comradeship with the Soviet dictator, to the point of separating himself from Churchill. He got Stalin to understand and at least be open to a new international organization that the Soviet Union might participate in, and develop a Soviet commitment to the Pacific war. Stalin got what he wanted: a cross-channel invasion in 1944. But the seeds of the Cold War were also present, as the discussion of the postwar world and in particular the issue of Poland came into focus at Tehran. Poland would be the wedge which would eventually separate the Anglo-Americans from the Soviet Union.

### **Roosevelt’s Personal Diplomacy: Postwar International Organizations**

Roosevelt wished to develop postwar international organizations which would spread economic prosperity, political stability and international peace throughout the world after the Second World War concluded. He had a strategy of getting these institutions in place. He would begin with the social and economic international organizations, and then move to create a new international organization that would deal with issues of war, peace, national securities and

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<sup>29</sup> See Butler, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 10/30/1943.

<sup>31</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 10/21/1943.

<sup>32</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 11/8/1943.

<sup>33</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 11/22/1943.

international stability: the United Nations (the name coming from the wartime coalition of nations fighting against Hitler and the Axis powers). As mentioned, Roosevelt was wary to avoid the mistakes which Woodrow Wilson had made regarding the membership and conceptual power structure of the League of Nations; Roosevelt believed that these weaknesses had helped sow the seeds of the rise of Hitler and the war. In particular, not only had Wilson failed to bring the United States into the League of Nations, but the Soviet Union was excluded (later Japan and Germany walked out). The internal structure of the League saw all member states as equals; Roosevelt recognized that while he was trying to transform the balance of power system, the superior status of the Great Powers in the world would have to be recognized.

Roosevelt pursued his strategy to bring the Soviet Union into his proposed postwar international system by first getting Stalin to agree to participate in the economic and social organizations, which would then draw the Soviet Union into a new international security organization. In the wake of the good feelings engendered by the Tehran conference, Roosevelt sent to both Stalin and Churchill a message concerning “postwar cooperative action in the various fields of international economic relations,” including issues such as commercial aviation and oil, and the first scheduled conference would occur in April 1944 for the International Labor Organization.<sup>34</sup> Stalin replied on March 10, basically repeating to Roosevelt that he agreed that various economic issues needed to be discussed and an order agreed upon. However, the Soviet government then informed the United States that they would not participate in the upcoming April 1944 I.L.O. conference. Roosevelt then wrote directly to Stalin on March 20, commenting that “It would be unfortunate if both our Governments did not take advantage of the conference in Philadelphia to *help our common objectives* . . . . In view of your interest in these matters and since there is a great range of social and economic problems that are of common interest to both our governments, I *greatly hope* that your government *will* participate.”<sup>35</sup> (italics in original). After Stalin continued to object that the I.L.O. was associated with the League of Nations (which had previously barred the Soviet Union from membership),<sup>36</sup> Roosevelt replied that the I.L.O. would make clear at the conference that it was no longer associated with the League of Nations but affiliated with the United Nations,<sup>37</sup> at which point Stalin agreed that the new arrangements would allow for Soviet participation in the I.L.O. conference.<sup>38</sup> While Roosevelt’s personal persistence and diplomacy eventually won him Stalin’s acquiescence regarding the I.L.O., it underscored that bringing the Soviet Union into postwar international arrangements, in an affable state, would not be a smooth or foregone process. In July 1944, the Soviet Union was a participant and signatory to the agreements made at the Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, monetary conference in which postwar exchange rates were agreed upon (the United States purchased gold at \$35 an ounce while other currencies would float against the dollar), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) were founded.

Roosevelt believed that his personal diplomacy with Stalin was having some effect in the wake of the Tehran conference. He wrote to Stalin immediately after the Tehran conference, “I hasten to send you my personal thanks for your thoughtfulness and hospitality in providing living quarters for me in your Embassy at Tehran. I was not only extremely comfortable there but I am

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<sup>34</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin and Churchill, 2/23/1944.

<sup>35</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/20/1944.

<sup>36</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 3/25/1944.

<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/31/1944.

<sup>38</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 4/6/1944.



very conscious of how much more we were able to accomplish in a brief period of time because we were such close neighbors throughout our stay. I view those momentous days of our meeting with the greatest satisfaction as being an important milestone in the progress of human affairs.”<sup>39</sup> He followed up this note with a second one sent the same day which again emphasized the Roosevelt personal touch: “The conference, I consider, was a great success and I feel sure that it was a historic event in the assurance not only of our ability to wage war together but to work for the peace to come in the utmost harmony. I enjoyed very much our personal talks together and particularly the opportunity of meeting you face to face. I look forward to meeting you sometime again.”<sup>40</sup>

Stalin’s reply was somewhat more laconic: “I agree with you that the Tehran conference was a great success and that our personal meetings were, in many respects, extremely important. . . . Now there is confidence that our peoples will harmoniously act together during the present time as well as after this war is over.”<sup>41</sup> But in the months that followed, Stalin did send messages of a warmer personal nature to Roosevelt. After learning that Roosevelt was suffering ill health, in January 1944 Stalin wrote to Roosevelt, “I am glad to learn from the information published in the press that you feel better. I convey to you the best wishes, and mainly—the wishes for a quick and complete recovery.”<sup>42</sup> And later that spring, Stalin penned an unusually warm thank you note to Roosevelt, addressing him as “My dear friend,” and concluding “I wish you health and success.”<sup>43</sup>

But the real reason for the thaw in Stalin’s attitude was of course the launching of the Overlord invasion, D-Day, June 6, 1944. When Overlord was launched, Stalin wrote to Roosevelt and Churchill “It rejoices all of us and makes us confident of future successes,” and he reaffirmed his Tehran pledge to conduct offensive operations against the Germans to aid the operation.<sup>44</sup> Stalin also sent to Roosevelt a photograph of himself in a silver frame with the inscription, “To President Franklin D. Roosevelt in memory of the day of the invasion of Northern France by the Allied American and British liberating armies. From his friend Joseph V. Stalin. June 6, 1944.”<sup>45</sup> The invasion fully activated the historical part of Stalin’s mind. On June 11, 1944, Stalin wrote to the historian Churchill an assessment of D-Day that is worth quoting in extent:

“As is evident, the landing, conceived on a grandiose scale, has succeeded completely. My colleagues and I cannot but admit that the history of warfare knows no other like undertaking from the point of view of its scale, its vast conception, and its masterly execution. As is well known, Napoleon in his time failed ignominiously in his plan to force the channel. The hysterical Hitler, who boasted for two years that he would effect a forcing of the channel, was unable to make up his mind even to hint at attempting to carry out his threat. Only our allies have succeeded in realizing with honour the grandiose plan of the forcing of the channel. History will record this deed as an achievement of the highest order.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/3/1943.

<sup>40</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/3/1943.

<sup>41</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 12/6/1943.

<sup>42</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 1/4/1944.

<sup>43</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 5/6/1944.

<sup>44</sup> Stalin to Churchill and Roosevelt, 6/7/1944.

<sup>45</sup> See Butler, p. 235.

<sup>46</sup> Stalin to Churchill, 6/11/1944.

But the emotional high point of the Normandy invasion would bring with it pressing new political problems, and bring the postwar world into sharper focus with every step of liberated territory taken from Hitler on both the western and eastern fronts of Europe. The European statesmen Churchill and Stalin were both keenly aware of the implications. As the Anglo-American armies first gained a foothold and then advancement into Europe, Roosevelt was quickly on top of the need for further personal diplomacy to shape the war and the postwar. He was the first to propose another conference to his Allies, and wrote to Stalin in July 1944, "Things are moving so fast and so successfully that I feel there should be a meeting between you and Mr. Churchill and me in the reasonably near future. The Prime Minister is in hearty accord with this thought."<sup>47</sup> In typical fashion, Stalin again agreed to the "desirability" of another meeting, but again offered the excuse that he could not leave "from the conducting of front matters."<sup>48</sup>

By the fall of 1944, the issue of Soviet participation in the proposed United Nations international organization was absorbing Roosevelt's attention (as will be seen, the issue of the future of Poland was even more contentious). The issue was over representation within the new organization; the Soviet Union was claiming at least three seats, based on the concept that the British Empire had federated voting blocs (it also might present problems for the federal system of the United States). Roosevelt was not the only one worried. At the end of September 1944, Churchill forwarded to Roosevelt a letter from Prime Minister Jan Smuts of South Africa. Smuts warned the Prime Minister that this issue "may poison European relations with far-reaching results. Russia, conscious of her power, may become more grasping than ever." Smuts then posed the worst case scenario: "If a world organization is formed with Russia out of it, she will become the power center of another group and we shall be heading for World War III. If no such organization is formed by the United Nations, they will stand stultified before history."<sup>49</sup> To one so conscious of Woodrow Wilson's history with the League of Nations, this was powerful and deeply shared sentiments. Roosevelt in fact answered Churchill, writing in return regarding Smuts' thoughts: "I think we are all in agreement with him as to the necessity of having the U.S.S.R. as a fully accepted and equal member of any association of the great powers formed for the purpose of preventing international war."<sup>50</sup>

But because of Stalin's personal delays, Churchill would move to act before the situation became irretrievable. If Stalin would not meet his Allies to discuss the postwar world while his armies were surging into Eastern Europe, and with Roosevelt facing a re-election campaign at home, Churchill determined that he would go to meet with Stalin. The meeting would produce an agreement of the sort which Roosevelt feared: an understanding based upon the balance of power situation, with the potential to lock Roosevelt into agreements or attach him to policies which he did not wish.

### **European Diplomacy: Churchill and Stalin, Moscow, October 1944**

Churchill was alarmed at Soviet actions in the Balkans as the Red Army advanced eastward towards Germany, and deemed it necessary to discuss with Stalin understandings on the future of Eastern Europe. As Stalin still refused to leave Russia, pleading front duties and doctor's orders, Churchill sent the President telegrams proposing that he personally to discuss issues including

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<sup>47</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 7/17/1944.

<sup>48</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 7/22/1944.

<sup>49</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 9/25/1944.

<sup>50</sup> Roosevelt to Churchill, 9/28/1944.

the Soviet membership in the proposed United Nations, Soviet plans regarding the Pacific war, and the future of Poland.<sup>51</sup> While Roosevelt did not wish to be left out of the meeting, in reality there was little Roosevelt could do to prevent his two Allies from meeting without him, especially as he conducted the last month of his re-election campaign at home. Roosevelt sent a telegram to Stalin with the comment “I am firmly convinced that the three of us, and only the three of us, can find the solution to the still unresolved questions,” and stated that he wanted to consider their meeting a “preliminary” to a three power summit to take place after his reelection.<sup>52</sup> The American Ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Averell Harriman, would serve as an observer in Roosevelt’s place.

At the October 1944 meeting between Churchill and Stalin, Churchill infamously gave Stalin a piece of paper with balance of power arrangements between the Soviet Union and Great Britain in the eastern European states (Rumania USSR 90%, others 10%; Greece Great Britain 90%, USSR 10%; Yugoslavia and Hungary 50-50%; and Bulgaria USSR 75%, others 25%). Without a word, the Soviet dictator placed a large blue pencil check next to the numbers on the page; when Churchill asked whether they should burn the document now that the bargain was struck, Stalin replied for him to keep it.<sup>53</sup> Churchill has been criticized for this “Percentages Agreement” with Stalin, although there is a serious case to be made for its utility and clearness; it should be noted that Stalin rather scrupulously stuck by the agreement regarding Greece.<sup>54</sup>

From the perspective of Franklin Roosevelt, however, the meeting only increased the need for a three power summit that he would have the decisive impact upon, particularly on two topics that Churchill and Stalin had not made part of their Percentages Agreement: the future of Germany, and most ominously in consideration of their previous correspondence, the future of Poland.

### **Roosevelt’s Personal Diplomacy: Poland**

As early as February 1943, Winston Churchill had sent to Roosevelt a messages entitled “Morning Thoughts, A Note on Postwar Security,” the first half of which is a remarkably prescient view of what would likely happen as a result of the Alliance (the second half is a long rumination on the potential role of Turkey in the war). In it, Churchill foresaw a peace conference concerning the future of Europe, while the Pacific war shifted to its final stage; he foresaw a new international body with geographic power blocs replacing the League of Nations; he foresaw a strident and difficult period of economic reconstruction throughout Europe after the war, and that reparations on Germany to pay for the ruin were not an option (compared to the 1919 Versailles agreement). And while he predicted that cooperation between the Soviet Union and Great Britain would continue in the postwar era based upon the twenty year alliance the two nations had signed to combat Hitler (an alliance which pledged neither wanted territorial acquisitions, in accord with the Atlantic Charter), Churchill also commented “Russians no doubt interpret this as giving them right to claim, subject to their agreement with Poland, their frontier of June 1941 before they were attacked by Germany.”<sup>55</sup> (The Soviet Union invaded the eastern

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<sup>51</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 9/29/1944 and 10/3/1944.

<sup>52</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 10/4/1944.

<sup>53</sup> For an account of this meeting, see Winston S. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), p. 226-227.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion, see Lukacs, p. 38-41.

<sup>55</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 2/2/1943.

half of Poland on September 17, 1939, pursuant to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and Poland had consequently disappeared from the map of Europe, absorbed by the totalitarian states).

Poland held special significance to the Anglo-Americans. Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany in September 1939 in accordance of the defensive alliance the two nations had signed earlier that year. In the United States, a large and politically significant voting block of Polish-Americans were a key constituency of Roosevelt's Democratic party, particularly in the eastern and Midwestern urban areas. Poland had the largest population of eastern European nations situated between Germany and Russia. The worst death camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka where Hitler was in the process of eliminating European Jewry through the Holocaust were located and operated by the Nazis within Poland. Poland would maintain a postwar moral significance to the Allies which justified and explained the war against Hitler, and Poland would be a precedent for postwar political settlements in Eastern Europe.

But the Allies experienced troubles over Poland from early in the war. There were two key issues at stake. First was the border of a restored Polish state, with Stalin insisting on Russia maintaining the invaded half of Poland which Russia held in June 1941 while Churchill proposed the Curzon line suggested from the 1919 Versailles conference (Roosevelt insisted that he could not take a territorial position because of domestic political views, but wanted the issue settled by summit). Second was the legitimate government of Poland. The exiled London Polish government was recognized by the United States and Great Britain, while as the Soviet armies moved into Eastern Europe, they cooperated with the so-called Lublin government which was staffed with Communist party members subservient to Moscow.

The first signs for future Allied trouble over Poland came with news that behind retreating German forces the bodies of over 4,500 Polish officers were found in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk. In truth, Soviet forces had killed these officers in 1940 after the 1939 invasion, but Stalin wrote Roosevelt on April 21, 1943, that "The recent conduct of the Polish Government towards the Soviet Union is regarded by the Soviet Government as absolutely abnormal and contrary to all rules and standards governing relations between allied countries," and he went on to blame the massacre on the Nazis in collaboration with Polish fascists.<sup>56</sup> Roosevelt answered Stalin's tirade with a gentle plea that "I can well understand your problem but I hope in present situation you can find means to label your action as a suspension of conversation with the Polish government in exile rather than a complete severance of diplomatic relations."<sup>57</sup> Roosevelt was unwilling to antagonize Stalin at this time not only because of the Soviet effort on the eastern front, but because he was still seeking a face-to-face meeting with him after eighteen months as allies (indeed, as seen, within little more than a week he asked for a meeting between just the two of them).

After Tehran, Roosevelt was willing to discuss the future of Poland, but was careful to appeal to Soviet sensibilities. He wrote to Stalin in February 1944, "First of all, let me make it plain that I neither desire nor intend to attempt to suggest much less to advise you in any way as to where the interests of Russia lie in this matter since I realize that the future security of your country is rightly your primary concern." Roosevelt's concession towards balance of power security interests in this instance reflected the "larger issues which affect the common goal," in other words the German defeat. But: "I am sure that a solution can be found which would fully protect the interests of Russia and satisfy your desire to see a friendly, independent Poland, and at the same time not adversely affect the cooperation so splendidly established at Moscow and

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<sup>56</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 4/21/1943.

<sup>57</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/26/1943.

Tehran.”<sup>58</sup> Stalin’s reply was formal and reiterated the two main points of contention regarding Poland, namely the border and recognition of an official government.<sup>59</sup> But after the London Poles refused to budge on territorial issues despite the advice and promptings of Winston Churchill, Stalin wrote to both Roosevelt and Churchill in early May 1944, declaring that the “emigrant Polish government does not want the establishment of normal relations with the USSR,” and that the “question regarding Polish-Soviet relations has not ripened yet.”<sup>60</sup>

The implication that the Polish situation might be settled in the future by the course of the war and Soviet armies perhaps prompted Roosevelt to issue his most effusive charm offensive to Stalin. Roosevelt’s reply again relied upon indirection; in his March 16 letter he did not mention Poland, but instead talked of the issue of Turkish chrome, declaring that “I know of your inventive genius,” regarding this “opportunity for a unique contribution to what really is the welfare of the world,” and Roosevelt was reassured because “I feel that now you and I can talk to each other as old friends.”<sup>61</sup>

While the upcoming D-Day invasion became the focus of discussion in the next months, with the successful landing Poland again became ripe for discussion. In late July Churchill again broached the topic with Stalin, who informed his Allies that as Soviet forces were occupying parts of Poland, it was necessary for the Soviet Union to cooperate with the Polish Committee of National Liberation—in other words, the Lublin Poles as they were known, and not the Polish government in exile in London.<sup>62</sup>

In August 1944, as the Red Army approached Warsaw, the Polish resistance rose up against the German occupation forces. Urging occupied peoples to revolt against the Nazis as Allied armies approached their lines had been a common feature of Allied radio propaganda, but when the Warsaw uprising took place, the Red Army halted short of Warsaw and allowed the Nazis to instead massacre the Poles. The Red Army had outrun its supply lines, but many suspected Stalin was insuring future political control of Poland by eliminating potential Polish leaders. Churchill got Roosevelt to agree to asking Stalin for assistance with Anglo-American air supplies to Warsaw,<sup>63</sup> but Stalin instead ducked the issue of Anglo-American aid and blamed the situation upon “. . . a handful of criminals, who for the sake of seizure of power undertook the Warsaw adventure . . .” and that the situation was benefiting only Hitler.<sup>64</sup>

Roosevelt did not ever again bring up the subject matter of the Warsaw uprising with Stalin, although Churchill was not as easily mollified. Churchill continued to protest and wrote to Stalin that “Your Government’s action in preventing this help being sent seems to us (ie, the British War Cabinet) at variance with the spirit of Allied cooperation to which you and we attach so much importance both for the present and the future.”<sup>65</sup>

The Anglo-American Allies recognized that issues needed to be discussed at first hand with Stalin, but as seen, only Churchill was in an immediate position to do so in the fall of 1944. After Churchill’s October 1944 Moscow visit, Roosevelt still insisted on a three power summit meeting, and after his re-election in early November 1944 he wrote to Stalin asking if it could be

<sup>58</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 2/7/1944.

<sup>59</sup> See Stalin to Roosevelt, 2/16/1944.

<sup>60</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, Stalin to Churchill, 3/3/1944.

<sup>61</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/16/1944.

<sup>62</sup> Stalin to Churchill, Stalin to Roosevelt, 7/23/1944.

<sup>63</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 8/20/1944.

<sup>64</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 8/22/1944.

<sup>65</sup> Churchill to Stalin, 9/4/1944.

postponed until after his inauguration on January 20, 1944.<sup>66</sup> There was the same haggling over timing and place, with Stalin again refusing to travel far from the Soviet Union. The issue of Poland only grew more heated between the Allies in the interim, but the Yalta conference would be the penultimate effort of Roosevelt's personal diplomacy.

### **Roosevelt's Personal Diplomacy: Yalta, February 1945**

Churchill made a speech the House of Commons in mid-December, 1944 on the policy of his government regarding Poland which caused Roosevelt to write to Stalin asking him to delay any recognition of the Lublin Poles as the official government of Poland by the Soviet government, and stating that he was certain this was a matter the three of them could work out at their upcoming meeting.<sup>67</sup> During December 1944, it should be noted that Roosevelt refused to take a position on the French-German border as he claimed that all border issues should be settled after the war and by Allied agreement. This artfully allowed him to continue to avoid the discussion on the Polish-Soviet border, and Stalin followed this lead. But Stalin sent two replies to Roosevelt concerning Roosevelt's cherished postwar organization and Poland. In the first he insisted that the Soviet position regarding representation in the proposed United Nations and regarding voting rules within the proposed Security Council (where it was proposed that a member state could not vote on issues in which it maintained a personal interest) could not be changed, implying Soviet non-participation.<sup>68</sup> In his second note, he told Roosevelt that the Soviet Union was recognizing the Lublin Poles as the official government due to national security reasons;<sup>69</sup> this note actually crossed with a plea from Roosevelt not to take this action until their summit because it would send to the world the message of Allied disunity,<sup>70</sup> but Stalin had instead presented Roosevelt with a *fait accompli*.

This was the situation when the Allied powers met for a second three power summit at Yalta in February 1945 at the Livadia palace on the Crimean coast. Roosevelt's health at this point was seriously deteriorating, but so was Hitler's empire, and the Allies met in an atmosphere of impending victory. The Yalta conference produced results which have been hotly debated by historians and scholars ever since. In summary, Roosevelt sought three main goals in this summit meeting: to secure Soviet participation in the war against Japan, to settle differences in representation and thus secure Soviet participation in the United Nations, and to secure the Atlantic Charter's principle of self-government for the peoples liberated from the Axis empires. Roosevelt believed that he had achieved all of his objectives.<sup>71</sup>

On the specific question of Poland, section VII of the Yalta agreements committed the Allies to a Polish government with broader representation: "This Polish Provisional Government of National Unity shall be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot."<sup>72</sup> Roosevelt and Churchill believed that this statement paved the way towards self-government for the Poles and by implication the rest of the Eastern European states.

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<sup>66</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 11/18/1944.

<sup>67</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/16/1944.

<sup>68</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 12/26/1944.

<sup>69</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 12/27/1944.

<sup>70</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 12/27/1944.

<sup>71</sup> Please see Protocol of Proceedings of Crimea Conference, in particular section (I) World Organization, (II) Declaration of Liberated Europe, and Agreement regarding Japan.

<sup>72</sup> Please see Protocol of Proceedings of Crimea Conference, (VII) Poland.

There is evidence that the Alliance was fracturing along with his personal diplomacy efforts even before Roosevelt's death. As the Anglo-American and Soviet armies swept into Germany itself, tensions began to flare. After Roosevelt asked Stalin to allow American officers into Soviet-occupied Poland to secure American prisoners of war previously being held in Poland by the German army, Stalin refused. "Frankly I cannot understand your reluctance to permit American officials and means to assist their own people in this matter. This Government has done everything to meet each of your requests," Roosevelt wrote to Stalin.<sup>73</sup> In reply, Stalin claimed that there were only seventeen Americans in all of Poland, and the American army was putting Soviet prisoners of war into the same shared encampments as German prisoners of war.<sup>74</sup> There was worse to come. When the surrender of the German army in Italy was being investigated by the Anglo-Americans, Stalin protested that since Soviet forces were not being included his Allies were seeking a separate peace with the Germans, in order to bleed the Soviet Union further (it should be noted that Stalin had refused to allow Anglo-American officers to participate in German surrender negotiations along the eastern front). After a conciliatory explanation of the Allied actions, in which Roosevelt commented that he was certain Soviet military officers would take the same actions as the Anglo-Americans in similar circumstances,<sup>75</sup> Stalin fired back an even more accusatory and inflamed reply.<sup>76</sup>

After years of personal diplomacy in which Roosevelt had constantly emphasized patience and consideration with his Soviet ally, he finally lost his patience. He inquired of the American ambassador whether Stalin was truly authoring these letters, and assured that it was authentically Stalin, he wrote to Stalin regarding German surrender that ". . . although both of us are in agreement on all the basic principles, the matter now stands in an atmosphere of regrettable apprehension and mistrust," and he reassured Stalin that any negotiations would include the Soviet Union and only be conducted on the basis of unconditional surrender. Roosevelt concluded, "I trust that the above categorical statement of the present situation and of my intentions will allay the apprehensions which you express in your message of March 29."<sup>77</sup>

The message had the opposite effect. Stalin agreed that the atmosphere had been poisoned, claimed that Roosevelt was not fully informed and that the American army was colluding with the Nazis "in return to ease for the Germans the peace terms." He claimed that the absence of Churchill and the British in this discussion confirmed Soviet suspicions, and that "the Germans on the Western front in fact have ceased the war against England and the United States. At the same time the Germans continue the war with Russia, the Ally of England and the United States." He concluded with his own personal flourish: ". . . I personally and my colleagues would never have made such a risky step, being aware that a momentary advantage, no matter what it would be, is fading before the principle advantage on the preservation and strengthening of trust among the Allies."<sup>78</sup>

Literally at the same time he was doing this in early April 1945, Stalin informed the Japanese government that he was canceling their neutrality pact, an obvious prelude to war. But Roosevelt was not mollified, although he maintained his diplomatic tone in his reply. "I have received with astonishment your message of April 3," he began, and then proceeded to

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<sup>73</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/17/1945.

<sup>74</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 3/22/1945.

<sup>75</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/24/1945.

<sup>76</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 3/29/1945.

<sup>77</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 3/31/1945.

<sup>78</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 4/3/1945.

categorically refute all of Stalin's previous accusations. With an eye to the main objective, defeat of Hitler, he wrote the sentence that begins this paper concerning personal trust. His conclusion deserves to be quoted at length:

“Finally I would say this, it would be one of the great tragedies of history if at the very moment of victory now within our grasp, such distrust, such lack of faith should prejudice the entire undertaking after the colossal losses of life, material and treasure involved.

“Frankly I cannot avoid a feeling of bitter resentment toward your informers, whoever they are, for such vile misrepresentations of my actions or those of my trusted subordinates.”<sup>79</sup>

Roosevelt even at this stage was careful not to personally accuse his ally, preferring to deflect blame onto Stalin's subordinates to give him room for a graceful retreat.

Stalin did not take it. Instead he sent Roosevelt two replies on April 7. The first did indeed seek to patch the personal aspect: “I never doubted your honesty and dependability, nor that of Mr. Churchill,” Stalin early commented, but then proceeded to repeat his accusations and deliver a defense of his informers.<sup>80</sup> But in a second message dated the same day, Stalin wrote to Roosevelt: “Matters on the Polish question have really reached a dead end.” He then placed the blame upon the Americans and British, who he accused of having “departed from the principles of the Crimea Conference,” and ignoring the national security interests of the Soviet Union regarding its need for a friendly government.<sup>81</sup> Stalin wanted to pack the Polish Provisional Government with his own people. Recognizing that free elections in staunchly Catholic Poland would not favor the Communist party, he would never deliver on the Yalta promise.

Roosevelt did reply to Stalin in one last letter, marked for its sense of distance and slight exasperation. On vacation in Warm Springs, Georgia he wrote to Stalin thanking him for the “frank explanation of the Soviet point of view” before dismissing the Soviet complaint as having “faded into the past without having accomplished any useful purpose.” He ended with a reminder that such incidents should be avoided in the future, and that the Nazi army was on the verge of collapse.<sup>82</sup>

Roosevelt wrote one other letter that day to an ally. He continued to focus to the end on his main goal: the defeat of Hitler and his enemies. For that purpose he wrote to Churchill on the same day that problems with Stalin had to be overcome for this goal, and famously concluded: “We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct.”<sup>83</sup> The next day, April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Adolf Hitler committed suicide eighteen days later.

### **Roosevelt's Personal Diplomacy: Summary and Conclusions**

Diplomatic historians and scholars have attempted for decades to judge the success of Roosevelt's efforts. With historical hindsight, the questions reappear: what effect did Roosevelt's personal diplomacy have not only on the Second World War, but the on the emergence of the Cold War? Did his personal diplomacy make a difference in events and change the course of history?

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<sup>79</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/4/1945.

<sup>80</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 4/7/1945.

<sup>81</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 4/7/1945.

<sup>82</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 4/11/1945.

<sup>83</sup> Roosevelt to Churchill, 4/11/1945.



The comprehensive record confirms that Roosevelt was a masterful statesman and strategist regarding his main goals of defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. In pursuit of his war strategy, he put his personality to work. This personal aspect allowed Roosevelt to work with difficult allies, and allowed him to focus on the achievement of his geopolitical goals, both in war and the postwar. Roosevelt defeated Hitler; he insured the eventual defeat of Japan. Roosevelt coaxed the Soviet Union into economic and labor international organizations, then established the United Nations organization with American and Soviet participation secured. Within the United Nations organization, he secured a more durable institution with a more workable internal framework recognizing Great Power realities. Through the Atlantic Charter and the Declaration on Liberated Europe, with the help of Churchill, he established an intellectual and idealistic framework against which the Soviet Union's future actions in Eastern Europe, especially Poland, might be judged.

Might Stalin have been more inclined to obey the Yalta agreements had Roosevelt lived? It is anti-historical to offer a definitive answer. It should be remembered that after the Yalta agreements in February 1945, Roosevelt died in April and Churchill lost his office in July. So when Stalin began to completely stifle the Yalta agreements upon free elections in Eastern Europe in the fall of 1945 (Poland was never granted a vote until 1989), his personal allies from the war were no longer in power. The personal diplomacy and history between the three leaders was gone. Instead the interests of their nation-states remained.

What definitively illustrated the limitations of personal diplomacy and personal trust between the allies (and supremacy of national interests) was the dog that did not bark, the topic which Roosevelt chose to never discuss with Stalin: the atomic bomb. Roosevelt trusted Churchill and worked with Britain to develop the weapon, but he never broached the subject in either his correspondence or meetings with Stalin. Given that Stalin had spy assets in place in the Manhattan project, it might be noted that Roosevelt's caution was justified. But again, the successful Los Alamos bomb was not detonated until July 1945, after Roosevelt's death; it is again anti-historical to speculate on what Roosevelt might have done with Stalin later.

Roosevelt wished to end the European great power system that he believed was responsible for two world wars within his lifetime. His postwar organizations sought to limit the powers of this system. But at best, his international organizations only bounded the great power system; it did not change it. Roosevelt himself recognized this reality in the Security Council of the United Nations. But conflicting national interests cannot necessarily be wished away. Despite his efforts, the solution to the Polish problem was unsolvable in the immediate context of war, and postwar history did not change the circumstances. Roosevelt's own allies both seemed to recognize this reality better than he did. Stalin knew Poland and the eastern European states would fall to him through the course of the war and the power of the sword. Churchill had foreseen that the future of Europe was between two alternatives: either Hitler dominated the entire continent, or there would be a division between a free West and a Stalinist East. Hence the comparative ease of their personal diplomacy, the Percentages Agreement in October 1944. The two European statesmen knew that their brand of diplomacy was not and would not be eclipsed in the future; the history of the United Nations organization during the Cold War bears out this great power interpretation.

Did Roosevelt's death change the course of history in 1945? The death of a great leader has done so in the past. The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln at the pinnacle of the war surely derailed the gentle Reconstruction program which Lincoln had planned for the American South; the Reconstruction period would have been very different had Lincoln lived.

So scholars might argue about the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the reconstruction of the world at the end of the Second World War. But Roosevelt's case is much less certain. The key element of Lincoln's conflict was that it was a national or civil war. In the international arena, the primacy of nation-states diffuses power amongst actors, and thus limits what any single leader can achieve, no matter how personally charismatic. The blunt spoken President Harry Truman represented a stylistic difference to Stalin and Churchill. But the political context in which Truman operated in ending the Second World War (the battles of Okinawa and Iwo Jima, the planned invasion of Japan, the deployment of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the political division of Europe) and the postwar political context of the world were historical landscapes which Roosevelt created, shaped and operated within. If Roosevelt had lived even another four or six months, would events have happened differently? A historian would have to conclude positively so, in some details. But Roosevelt did not. Perhaps the greatest lesson of his efforts at personal diplomacy is that history and national interest, in the end, transcend any individual personality's control.

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