The infamous courtship of a patrician and a revolutionist

Roosevelt and Stalin (II)

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President Roosevelt's World War II courtship of Stalin reached its heights, as I have indicated, in the two summit meetings at Teheran and Yalta. At the first, during the course of three private talks with Stalin from which Churchill was excluded, FDR made clear that he would go along with Stalin's territorial desires in Eastern Europe and assured Stalin also that America would put up little if any protest over annexation of the Baltic states. He also gave his personal assurances of a rich reward in the Far East for Russia for its agreement to join in the war against Japan once Hitler was defeated.

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As Chester Wilmot pointed out more than thirty years ago in his path-breaking The Struggle for Europe, the real crime of Yalta was the moral cloak it gave Stalin for all the heinous depredations upon Poland and other Eastern states—starting with the pact with Hitler, including the Katyn Forest slaughter of many thousands of Polish officers, and continuing down to the cruel and blatant perfidy of the Soviets in the tragic Warsaw Uprising of August 1944—and for all that he would subsequently do by ruthless aggression first in the Far East and then in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Declaration on Liberated Europe, perhaps the greatest single piece of duplicity in World War II, carrying, alas, Churchill's as well as Roosevelt's and Stalin's names, was all Stalin needed to undergird a foreign policy and military strategy that reaches down to the present moment. With its calculated ambiguities covering such matters as human rights, democracy, and peace, the declaration read as if it had been written by Lenin and Stalin for the official Soviet canon. Needless to say, this fact did not prevent Roosevelt, upon his return from Yalta, from celebrating Yalta as a setting worthy of comparison to Philadelphia and the signing of the Constitution. Churchill was scarcely better.

But the saga of Roosevelt's courtship of Stalin is by no means confined to the Teheran and Yalta summits. There is no want of other, separate and distinct, demonstrations of ardor toward Stalin. There was Roosevelt's sudden gift—without any prior notification of Churchill—of one-third of the Italian navy to Stalin. All Stalin had asked for at Teheran was a loan of half a dozen ships for use in northern and southern waters. Churchill was thunderstruck when word of FDR's public announcement reached him in London, and he was quick to refuse his assent. But he was equally quick to take steps that would save FDR from a potentially embarrassing, even explosive, situation. Churchill's superior wisdom had once again come to the rescue.

Another incident that reveals Roosevelt's alacrity in accepting of Stalin's
suggestions—and the necessity of being once again overruled by better judgment—is the "pastoralization" of Germany after the war. We are best acquainted with this horrendous proposal through the Morgenthau Plan, which seriously proposed the total stripping from Germany of its industry and capital technology and reducing it to arable and pasture. But Stalin had thought of the possibility and recommended it earlier: during one of the private sessions with Roosevelt at Teheran he broached it. Germany, he said, should be pastoralized and also dismembered into five or six new, small countries. The strategic importance of such geopolitical mutilation from the Soviet point of view is obvious—as is the related recommendation that France too be reduced to a third-rate power. Russia would then have uncontested power over Western Europe, as well as Eastern.

At Teheran Stalin also proposed the immediate execution of 50,000 German officers once the war was over. Churchill was offended and said so. Roosevelt, playing the role of mediator in elaborately comic fashion said Stalin was too high: 49,000 would be better. Later in the evening Elliot Roosevelt argued for the execution of between 50,000 and 100,000 German officers. Churchill, in visible anger and disgust, left the room. Stalin came over and put his arm around Elliot's shoulder in a gesture of affection.

Thus Roosevelt was fully prepared in mind for the infamous Morgenthau Plan, and put his name to it at the second Quebec Conference in September 1944. The gist of the plan is contained in the mandate that industrial Germany "should not only be stripped of all presently existing industries but so weakened and controlled that it cannot in the foreseeable future become an industrial area." Wheeler-Bennett accurately observes: "Marshal Stalin could scarcely have gone further."

So, by a neat trick, was Churchill brought to sign the plan. It was linked inextricably with desperately needed credits for Britain amounting to six billion dollars. Churchill probably shrugged, knowing that so appalling and geopolitically contentious a measure would never get through Roosevelt's chief advisers in Washington. And Churchill was right. When Roosevelt returned to Washington, he was confronted by a grim Stimson, Hull, McCloy, and even Hopkins, who explained just what the plan meant. Roosevelt was overcome, and the plan was allowed to die quietly. At least, he may well have thought, Stalin knew he had tried.

The Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, with its massacre by the Germans of thousands of Poles, many of high station, is another unsavory illustration of Anglo-American, chiefly American, cravenness before Stalin. But to appreciate this horror, we are obliged to go back to an earlier one: that of the slaughter—execution by the Soviets of thousands of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest in 1939 after Stalin had divided shares of Poland with Hitler. Some 15,000 Polish officers were rounded up by the Soviets; about a third were cruelly executed on the edges of pits they had been forced to dig themselves. The rest of the captive officers were shipped to the gulag, never to be heard of again, presumably destroyed by the Russians. Despite repeated efforts by the Polish government-in-exile in London to obtain information about them from the Soviet government, nothing was ever disclosed by the Kremlin.

In 1943 the German army came across the shallowly buried Polish corpses. Naturally the Nazis publicized to the world their grisly discovery, using it as anti-Soviet and also anti-British and -American propaganda. The Polish government in London called for an international commission to investigate the charges, which the Soviets promptly denied, accusing the Polish government of collaborating with the Nazis. There was no question in any responsible person's mind of Soviet guilt in the massacre of the Polish officers, but from the day of the call for an international commission, the Soviets kept up a perpetual barrage of hatred against the official Polish government.

Then, in August 1944, the Soviets cruelly widened their attack. Germans were still in
occupation of Warsaw but preparing to retreat from the city. Moscow Radio for days secretly called upon the Polish Home Guard in Warsaw to revolt on a certain day, promising that the already-advancing Soviet army would move in immediately to engage the Germans. Instead, after the Polish uprising in Warsaw began, the incoming Soviet troops suddenly stopped at a river a few miles from Warsaw and watched the spectacle over several days of Nazi massacre of the rebelling Home Guard.

This ugly display of Soviet barbarism took place, it must be realized, three months after the Normandy landing, after Paris had been freed, and after there was only the slightest threat to Russia from the German armies. The world was shocked, and when the British and Americans asked Stalin for permission to use Soviet air fields if any of their own planes were crippled and forced to land in their mission of dropping supplies for the Warsaw Poles, the answer was a sharp no. The reactions by Churchill and Roosevelt were individually characteristic. Churchill, on August 25, sent Roosevelt a draft telegram to Stalin for concurrence, one begging for a relenting of the Soviet decision in order that the British and Americans, on their own responsibility alone, might help. Roosevelt, on the very next day, replied stiffly: "In consideration of Stalin's present attitude in regard to relief of the Polish underground . . . I do not consider it advantageous to the long-range, general war prospect for me to join with you in the proposed message."35

It was about this time that Churchill wrote Roosevelt to say that Chaim Weizmann (head of the World Zionist Organization) had asked that the Jews be allowed to organize a brigade of their own, with their own commanders, uniform, flag, etcetera, to join in the war against the Germans. Churchill was all for it, and he was obviously eager to have Roosevelt join him. But the President's reply was a model of brevity and coldness: "I perceive no objection to your organizing a Jewish brigade as suggested."36 End of message. But, then, as we have seen, FDR had never been able to bring himself to serious concern about Poles, East Europeans, et al.

A particularly important consequence of Roosevelt's almost abject devotion to Stalin is to be seen in his reaction to the British Mediterranean strategy. It was, predictably, as negative as Stalin's had been from the outset. This strategy was never declared by the British a substitute for the second front across the Channel, though both Stalin and Roosevelt chose to see it in this light.37 Churchill and the British chiefs simply recognized the absolutely vital role of the Mediterranean in both military and political contexts. To lose it to the Soviets would be ruinous to Western civilization. Hence the necessity of shoring up Greek, Italian, and also Yugoslavian approaches to the Mediterranean. Hence too the attractiveness of mounting campaigns from Italy especially which would additionally carry, if successful, the Allies into Central Europe, where they could wound the German armies and also, as Churchill put it, "shake hands with the Russians as far east as possible." But the Americans were blind, willfully so, to all such strategy.

It was this American blindness to the importance of the eastern Mediterranean, together with a lack of sympathy for any part of the "soft underbelly" strategy Churchill supported, that led the Prime Minister to begin thinking in 1944 about a private arrangement with Stalin out of which could come the strong influence he needed in Greece. In early June he proposed indirectly to Stalin that in return for Stalin's allowing him the measure of influence he wanted in Greece, he, Churchill—together with FDR—would grant the same to Stalin in Romania.

Roosevelt did not like this; it conformed with his distaste for anything suggesting imperialism and colonialism and would lead, he was certain, to "spheres of influence" in the postwar period instead of the single, unalloyed international order he cherished. He wrote Churchill precisely to this effect. Churchill was unconvinced. By August it was apparent to Churchill that Stalin was secretly considering an arrange-
ment whereby he would have, through the operations of the Greek Communist guerrillas and their possible overthrow of the Greek monarchy, control of the Balkans, including Greece with its window on the Mediterranean.

Thus, when the Third Moscow Conference was held in October, Churchill, in a private meeting with Stalin—Roosevelt did not attend the conference—proposed his famous, or notorious, “percentages” agreements, to which Stalin readily agreed. Percentages were guidelines to the degree of permitted Soviet versus British and American influence in the Balkan countries. Thus, in return for a 90–10 percent proportion in favor of Britain in Greece, there was a 90–10 percent proportion favoring Russia in Romania and a 75–25 proportion for Russia in Bulgaria. More equal proportions were agreed upon for Hungary and Yugoslavia. For Churchill, the gain of Greece was clear net; after all there was not much that could have been done anyhow about Russia in Romania and Bulgaria. Three months after the agreements were reached by Churchill, he went to Greece, at Christmas, where he propped up the faltering monarchy with a strong regent and rallied the Greek army to repulse the Greek Communist guerrillas. He saved Greece and also the Mediterranean from highly probable Soviet domination after the war.

None of this “sphere of influence” operation was palatable to Roosevelt, who, in Sir John Colville’s words, shook “in impotent fury” at Churchill’s “imperialistic” behavior. So did other Americans, including some at the State Department and major newspapers. Churchill was undisturbed. To Roosevelt’s critical reaction and complaint about high-handedness, Churchill wrote: “Action is paralyzed if everybody is to consult everybody about everything.”

Stalin understood strategy very well. He wanted to be certain that his Western allies did not get themselves into central and eastern areas of Europe while the war against Germany was still under way and thus be in the Soviets’ way when the time for postwar “stabilization” came. Stalin saw very clearly, and very early, the potentiality the Italian campaign had for this undesirable development. The defeat of Italy was an easy matter and of no real consequence. But Stalin knew well what Churchill had in mind: the advance of the victorious Allied armies past Rome, up into the Po Basin and thence in due time into Central Europe above the Alps. Not surprisingly, then, Stalin began counteraction at Teheran. General Brooke noted that “Stalin, to the delight of the Americans, championed a suggestion . . . that the Italian campaign should be abandoned in favor of a landing of the Mediterranean coast of France.”

Churchill, depressedly, had foreseen this on his way to the Teheran conference. He told Harold Macmillan: “Germany is finished, though it may take some time to clean up the mess. The real problem is Russia. I can’t get the Americans to see it.” Wheeler-Bennett after thus citing Churchill, adds about the Prime Minister:

Throughout the Teheran conference Mr. Churchill’s depression increased. He was depressed at the all too apparent rapacity of Soviet claims, at the degree of acquiescence with which these were received by the President, and at his own dilemma. For although he alone realized the magnitude of the danger involved, he knew too that alone he was powerless to avert it. Committed by inclination and policy to maintaining a solidly unified Anglo-American front, he was faced with a situation in which American policy chimed in more often with that of Stalin than with his own. He was thus compelled, usually against his better judgment, to concur in decisions which he felt to be imimical to the interests of Europe in general and Britain in particular.

To this must be added the inescapable fact that the United States was rapidly becoming the dominant partner in the alliance—in number of troops and in amount of material. It could call the tune.

The more notable U.S. strategic follies in the European theater are almost always derivatives of Roosevelt’s policy of deferring to Stalin. Thus the absurd insistence
on a cross-channel second front in 1942; the complete failure ever to grasp the importance of Britain's Mediterranean strategy; the effort to give Stalin a third of the Italian navy; the belief in a last-ditch Nazi "national redoubt" in southern Germany, with troops duly dispatched; and, far from least, ANVIL.

This is the name given the purportedly diversionary Allied invasion of southern France. Stalin first thought of it; he had the best of reasons to see Italy robbed of valuable divisions to make ANVIL possible. For, as noted, these divisions were pointed through the north of Italy directly toward Central Europe, toward Vienna and Prague, and he wanted none of that. Hence Stalin's strong suggestion at Teheran—with Roosevelt's immediate endorsement—of the southern France operation, one assertedly to assist the larger Allied landing across the Channel in the north of France. The British were not taken in. They knew that such an operation was unnecessary to protect the flanks of the Normandy landing and the march east. And the British were to be proved right. Almost no opposition was met by the eight largely prime grade Anglo-American divisions transferred from Italy to ANVIL, and within a few weeks these troops had been quietly enfolded within Eisenhower's massive army to the north, their actual military value in the south nonexistent.

Churchill suffered more perhaps from Roosevelt's blind insistence upon emasculation of the Italian campaign—and of all hopes of beating the Russians to Vienna and Prague—than from any other single act by Roosevelt during the war. "What can I do, Mr. President," he wrote despairingly to Roosevelt, "when your Chiefs of Staff insist upon casting aside our Italian offensive campaign, with all its dazzling possibilities?" Ambassador Winant wrote an urgent note to Roosevelt to say that he had never seen Churchill as badly shaken. Only the pleas of his military chiefs seem to have prevented Churchill from resigning his role of British leader. For he believed completely in his plan to use Italy as the way to Central Europe and thus to putting a check on a Russian monopoly of the area after the war as well as on Nazi war operations.

But Roosevelt was immovable and doubtless would have been even if Churchill had resigned. He had given his full support at Teheran to Stalin in the ANVIL matter. He would not be, not then or later, any apparent threat to Stalin's sole, uncontested mastery of almost everything east of Berlin and Prague. To give Stalin as much as possible was, as he was quite willing to say openly, a part of his plan to get Stalin's full cooperation in the postwar reordering of the whole world, in the interest of peace and democracy. Churchill never forgot ANVIL. In his war memoirs he wrote: "The army of Italy was deprived of its opportunity to strike a most formidable blow at the Germans, and very possibly reach Vienna before the Russians, with what might have followed there." Mark Clark, commanding American general in Italy, felt exactly as Churchill did. "A campaign that might have changed the whole history of relations between the Western world and the Soviet Union was permitted to fade away. . . . The weakening of the campaign in Italy in order to invade Southern France, instead of pushing on into the Balkans, was one of the outstanding mistakes of the War."43

Even the notorious decision, solely on his own, by Eisenhower at the very end of March 1945 to make direct contact with Stalin by telegram with the message that he himself saw no value in an occupation of Berlin—the showcase as well as command center of all Nazi Germany—and would bypass it, was a product at bottom of Roosevelt's policy, well known to Marshall and the other American chiefs, of deferring to Stalin in all possible matters. It is inconceivable that Eisenhower would have violated the military chain of command and failed to consult the combined chiefs in advance about his message had he not been sure beyond the slightest doubt that his action was in complete accord with Roosevelt's and Marshall's political views of the Soviets. Eisenhower, like
most other American generals in U.S. history, had a passion for confining himself solely to military matters, leaving everything with political overtones to the President alone. As Forest Pogue has concluded: Eisenhower's wartime decisions "hewed strictly to Roosevelt's political desires."

Political policy was Roosevelt's alone to make, Ike insisted, and he was hardly in any doubt of what Roosevelt's policy toward the Soviets was. As Stephen Ambrose has written: "There can be legitimate debate about the wisdom of the President's policy, but there can be no doubt . . . what the policy was; it is equally clear that Eisenhower was trying to act within the context of the wishes of his political superior."44

Precisely. Of course Eisenhower might at least have allowed his closest staff to draft the message to Stalin to ensure clarity. For, as the result of Ike's own hasty drafting of the telegram to Stalin, twenty-four hours were lost while the American Military Commission under General Deane in Moscow frantically sought, by messages to SHAEF, the precise meaning of Eisenhower's original telegram, which the Commission was required to translate. General Deane was well aware of the agreed upon strategy by the Anglo-American forces to take Berlin for both military and political reasons. Now, this sudden, badly written message to Stalin—in violation of the chain of command—could only throw confusion into General Deane's mind. And of course into Churchill's and the British chiefs' minds.

The British had not even had the courtesy of an advance notice of what Eisenhower planned to write Stalin. Only after the telegram was dispatched to Stalin were the British notified, and accordingly stunned. Churchill pleaded with Ike to cancel his message to Stalin; but to no avail. It was, declared Eisenhower, a strictly "military" communication to Stalin, and he, Eisenhower, deferred to Roosevelt, his commander in chief, in all political affairs: or rather, to Roosevelt and Hopkins. There was not the slightest question in his or General Marshall's mind that he had conformed utterly and completely to the President's political wishes.

American General Simpson of the Ninth Army was probably the severest casualty—that is, he and his entire confidence and eager army. By early April, a few days after Eisenhower dispatched his telegram to Stalin, the Ninth Army stood poised on the bank of the Elbe, a few crossings already achieved, waiting for the order from headquarters to march into Berlin, less than a two-days' operation, what with generally receptive Germans along the way only too happy to welcome Anglo-Americans instead of the feared and hated Russians. But instead of the order to proceed, there came an order to stop permanently—an order from Ike himself. "Nothing ever shook him [General Simpson] from the belief that the only thing standing between the Ninth Army and Berlin was a wide open autobahn,"45 writes Ambrose. And with every reason. Berlin was a gift to Stalin by Eisenhower in the name of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Churchill, echoing his chiefs' consternation, started to protest strongly to Roosevelt, but he desisted shortly; by this late date in the war, he knew only too well the hopelessness of countering decisions and actions which were stimulated by the President's desire to assure Stalin of his unwavering trust. Churchill thought a Latin quotation was in order. What he might have sent FDR was the chilling Lucretian Concede: Necesseset ("Relax: it's inevitable") directed at himself in irony. But what he did send was Amantium irae amoris integratio est, translated by the President's staff as "Lovers' quarrels always go with true love."46

By the spring of 1945 there could not have been many in the higher councils of the British and the Americans who were unaware of Roosevelt's almost compulsive strategy of reassuring and pleasing Stalin at just about any cost. General Deane and Averell Harriman in Moscow were high among the initiated in this respect. Both sent telegrams to the President or to Hopkins seeking to warn the White House of
the by now naked Soviet policy of exploiting the Anglo-American aid program for all it was worth. "I have evidence," Harriman wrote, "that they have misinterpreted our generous attitude toward them as a sign of weakness and acceptance of their policies. . . Unless we take issue with the present policy, there is every indication that the Soviet Union will become a world bully." 47 But Harriman, by this time, had little confidence that he could succeed, at least lastingly, in his effort to warn. The President "consistently shows very little interest," Harriman wrote in his diary, "in Eastern European countries except as they affect sentiment in America." 48

Two incidents suggest that occasionally at least the light shone through to Roosevelt's inner mind. Once at lunch in the White House, when one of Harriman's cables was brought to him, he reacted angrily: "Averell is right. We can't do business with Stalin. He has broken every one of the promises he made at Yalta." 49 And about the same time he uttered a similar remark to Anne O'Hare McCormick of The New York Times, declaring that although he continued to believe in the Yalta agreements, he had since found out that Stalin was "no longer a man of his word; either that or he was no longer in control of the Soviet government." 50

No doubt such stories reflect a part of the truth; even FDR and perhaps Hopkins had moments when Stalin's actions became too blatantly self-serving or antagonistic for easy assimilation. But, on balance, the fairest judgment is that Roosevelt remained serenely confident to the very end that he could "personally handle" Stalin, as he had boasted to Churchill as far back as March 1942. His final letter to Churchill, written by his own hand at Warm Springs a day before he died, read in part: "I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible." This after months of Soviet rapacity, duplicity, and brutal subjugation of occupied East European countries!

In conclusion, the question must be asked once and for all: what led Roosevelt to embark as early as 1941 on the course of pleasing Stalin, a course that sometimes came close to disaster? It is easy to agree with George Kennan that the course Roosevelt took was "puerile," that it was by any accounting credulous in the extreme. But we need to know why, by what ideals or hopes, he was driven to such transparently puerile and credulous behavior. What were the strings pulling on his will? He thought himself a politician of the order of Churchill and doubtless Lincoln and Washington. But in all truth he was not; he did not come very close.

Whatever he might have been or become, his political vision, especially though not exclusively in foreign matters, was shaped by one of the most powerful democratic forces of the twentieth century: Woodrow Wilson and Wilsonianism. It is likely that even if the young FDR had not managed to become assistant secretary of state under Wilson in World War I, he would have still become an ardent follower of the author of the League of Nations. Young men of breeding, wealth, and education in Eastern private schools and colleges were prone to becoming Wilsonians during the 1920s and 1930s. In the United States Wilson became invested, even before his death, with all the martyrdom and the piercing vision of the good and eternal that any Christian saint might yearn for. It is hardly too much to say that in the eyes of many millions of Americans, Wilson was a saint: Christian and American in equal proportions.

President Roosevelt wanted, in the depth of his being, to do what Wilson had failed at: that is, make the world safe for democracy—American-style of course—and peace for all men. Roosevelt's interest in the European war, and in America's involvement in that war, rose out of a growing envisagement of himself as a Wilson resurrected to meet yet another world crisis. He had given America the New Deal; why not now a New Deal for all the world? Roosevelt seems to have been indifferent when the rumblings of approaching war in Europe began to be heard. Not indifferent, though, to America's interests. These he
saw stoutly in the beginning as calling for strict neutrality. So had Wilson through most of 1916. Only when it came to Wilson like a thunderbolt that so crass and repugnant a war as that taking place across the Atlantic was exactly the opportunity sent him by God to vouchsafe himself in the interests of all mankind, did Wilson change—and so very suddenly—from neutrality and isolation to intervention.

Roosevelt, with fewer dramatic pawings of the air and clutchings at his breast, did very much the same between 1939 and the beginning of 1941. That was when he gave his Four Freedoms to the world. Here, he said in effect, are the real and the true objectives of the war now going on in Europe between Great Britain and Nazi Germany. FDR was exactly like his saint, Wilson, in this respect. It simply was not enough that great powers should fight for mere survival, and then military victory, against a dangerous and marauding "guttersnipe" like Hitler. Larger ideals and visions had to come into the picture in order to transfigure mere national interest into a shining crusade for mankind.

It was thus inevitable that Roosevelt would seek his historic meeting with Churchill in August 1941 in Argentia Bay, off Newfoundland. For Roosevelt had another message from heaven to present: the Atlantic Charter. He had had it drafted before he left Washington, but thought to have Churchill, after a long talk, do a fresh draft. The United States was not even in the war at that point, except as noncombatant ally and purveyor of Lend-Lease. But that did not faze Roosevelt. He knew that he was walking in Woodrow Wilson's footsteps when to a surprised Churchill he presented the idea, and indeed most of the details, of a charter that would at once define and elevate this war between Great Britain—and now, by just a couple of months, the Soviet Union—and Hitler's Germany.

The next step, as we have seen, was that of remaking the image of the Soviet Union, even to the point of endowing it magically with religious freedom—the mere thought of which must have nauseated Stalin and the Politburo. Somehow Americans must be shown the light: that is, the overwhelming truth that beneath the Soviet veneer of purges, genocides, and pervasive terror, there lay a different Russia; the Russia that had been captured by Joseph Davies in his Mission to Moscow and the Hollywood producers in their movie of the book—a movie that FDR loved to see repeatedly in the White House. This was a Russia in which men like Stalin and Molotov resembled America's own Founding Fathers; it was a Russia, deep down, of equality, social justice, and fraternity.

Everything followed of course from this master perception which had been generated in FDR's mind by Harry Hopkins' fateful visit to Moscow in the late summer of 1941. It was after Hopkins' return to the White House with his glowing report that things began to move, almost like events in a drama: the frenetic speeding up of Russian relief; the easy inclusion of the Soviets in the Atlantic Charter; the obsessive desire for private meetings with Stalin; Teheran and its massive gifts by FDR to Stalin; the volunteering of a third of the Italian navy to Stalin; acceptance of Stalin's ANVIL strategy; the occupation of Berlin by the Russians alone; everything.

We must not forget unconditional surrender, another divine message, just like the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter, as far as Roosevelt was concerned. With it the peace process could be hygienically postponed until the war was over and the peacemakers, under FDR's stern gaze, could work from reason and justice, with all mankind the object of deliberation rather than sordid "spheres of influence" and other products of the imperialistic past. Also the doctrine of unconditional surrender would be a nice screen for FDR's rather primitive knowledge of geopolitics. That such a doctrine was detested by almost all military strategists and that it cut the ground from under the brave resistance movements in enemy territory mattered not to Roosevelt.51

Roosevelt's ignorance of not only the political geography of the world but also the peoples of the world was vast. His life
had not made possible the kind of knowledge that was mere routine in Churchill's and even Stalin's *modus operandi*. Roosevelt confessed to Frances Perkins one day that while he knew "good" Italians and Frenchmen from "bad" ones, he was not sure about Russians. This, the reader must be advised, was spoken after he had come back from Teheran, where, as we know, he had quite literally given away the store to the Russians. FDR asked Miss Perkins if she would help him out by taking special note in her ordinary reading of any characterizations of the Russian people.52

But such confessed ignorance of Russians did not hinder Roosevelt's open-mouthed appreciation of the Soviets and their consecration to the good society. He told the Secretary that there was an "almost mystical devotion" in the Soviet leaders' attitude toward their people. "They all seem really to want to do what is good for their society instead of wanting to do for themselves. We take care of ourselves and think about the welfare of the people afterward." 53 If that particular piety were not still alive and well in American liberal thought, we could stop a moment and marvel at it in Roosevelt.

There was simply no restraining Roosevelt when it came to the Russians. At Yalta, according to the Alanbrooke diaries, he declared: "Of one thing I am certain, Stalin is not an imperialist."54 In the strict Marxian sense, Stalin of course was not. But that bit of Marxist writ surely was not in Roosevelt's mind when he spoke. The question is, what was in it? He had, as we have seen, an uncanny ability to overlook Soviet annexations and depredations in Eastern Europe, once the tide of war had changed and the Germans were retreating westward, all the while he was ever-censorious about British and French protectiveness of their dependencies.

Once Roosevelt confronted Churchill in person about his and Britain's imperialism. "Winston, this is something you are not able to understand. You have 400 years of acquisitive instinct in your blood, and you just don't understand how a country might not want to acquire land somewhere if they can get it. A new period has opened in the world's history and you will have to adjust to it.55

Here we have the very essence of Roosevelt's envisagement of the war. It was a war against Hitler, of course; but it was something a great deal more in Roosevelt's strange mind. It was a war, in the main, against something that European countries—with Britain in the ignoble vanguard—had practiced for too long: imperialism and with it colonialism. Roosevelt might, just might, have seen the greater enemy as totalitarianism, as Churchill had ever since the Bolshevik Revolution. After all, FDR had the evil common denominator between the Soviets and the Nazis before his very eyes. But he was prevented by his peculiar idols of the mind from seeing it.

In all his performance during World War II, there is little evidence that Roosevelt ever reached an understanding of either the totalitarian state or the profound role of communism in the creation and development of this novel form of political order. Churchill may have lacked a full understanding of the totalitarian process, but with his usual instinctive genius he had recognized Bolshevism as a new type of despotism and the natural enemy of democracy and civilization in the West. He lauded the White Russian armies, and he sought with every means he had to give them the fullest possible support. And he relaxed his personal war on communism only when, as he saw it, its equally evil twin, nazism, came on the scene and became, by the middle 1930s, the more pressing enemy of the West.

Roosevelt was totally unable to see nazism as a creed drawn from an almost identical worship of collectivist power and Hitler as a demagogue who had unabashedly learned from Lenin and Leninism. *For* Roosevelt the Soviets had a "mystical" devotion to the commonweal. He liked that. The Nazis, however, in the President's weird mind, were really recrudescences of German imperialists like Bismarck, Treitschke, and Moltke. They were really, sad to say, like the British and
French imperialists, only somewhat more militaristic.

He called General Patrick Hurley to him on one occasion. He wanted Hurley to hear him out on the evil of imperialism, no matter what its national color, and particularly on British imperialism. And he wanted Hurley to take those Rooseveltian insights and expand them into a report on the subject. Hurley was something of a laughingstock, "half uniform, half buffoon," some said, but Roosevelt had immense confidence in him. We learn from Kimball, editor of the Correspondence, that Hurley was an agent of the Sinclair Oil Company and actively seeking oil concessions in Iran. But this did not bother Hurley, or Roosevelt either, assuming he was aware of it. Hurley furnished the President with a report, using Iran as his ideal-type of the imperialist victim of the Britains and Frances.

"We are approaching the irrepressible conflict between world-wide imperialism and world-wide democracy," declared the General. He added that British imperialism was being defended with the blood "of soldiers of the most democratic nation on earth," the United States. "Britain," he announced, "can be sustained as a first class power, but to warrant support from the American people she must accept the principles of liberty and democracy and discard the principles of oppressive imperialism."

On the other hand, declared Hurley, "Soviet Russia has earned for herself an assured place as a first class world power. Friendship and cooperation between the United States and the U.S.S.R are essential to peace and harmony in the postwar world." Moreover, "Soviet prestige has benefited from their own well-ordered conduct and by their direct and positive relations with the Iranians."

Roosevelt sent a copy of the full Hurley report to Churchill on February 29, 1944, indicating that "I rather like his general approach." Poor Churchill. Two months passed before he could bring himself to reply to Roosevelt. "The General seems to have some ideas about British imperialism which I confess made me rub my eyes. He makes out that there is an irrepressible conflict between imperialism and democracy. 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."56

If someone had attempted to tell Roosevelt that the kind of aristocrats and monarchs he feared were the prime prey of the totalitarianists, Communist or Nazi, that the very essence of the total state was its accolades to the "people," "masses," "workers," and "democracy" and, all the while, the extermination of aristocratic imperialists of the old mold, the President would surely have called the Secret Service for protection from such a madman. Or he would have telephoned Stalin to give him the flavor of the joke.

Roosevelt’s sense of what the true enemy of the world was corresponded perfectly with Woodrow Wilson’s in World War I: in a word, capitalist imperialism. He was therefore largely insensitive to the massive change in the world represented by the rise of totalitarianism, first in Russia, then Italy, Germany, and in time many other states. As Roosevelt had indicated to Stalin at Teheran, much to Charles Bohlen’s dismay and incredulity, the Russian Revolution was one of the masses, one from the bottom up, not top down. At bottom the Bolshevik was a populist, a friend of the common man, a worker for justice. Hence Roosevelt’s virtual blindness to the horror of the Soviet massacre at Katyn Forest, to the Warsaw rising—betrayed by the Soviets—, to the brutal Sovietization of Romania and the Baltic states even before the war had ended, to Stalin’s and Molotov’s cynical, doubtless amused, double-crossing of their Polish guarantees at Yalta, and the equally cynical exploitation of FDR’s United Nations organization.

But hence also FDR’s instantaneous sensitivity to British and French acts of “imperialism,” to Britain’s failure to liberate all India as a war measure, to Churchill’s bold and prescient assumption of com-
mand in Greece at Christmas 1944. That act so bothered Roosevelt, so tore at his Wilsonian conscience, that in the spring of 1945, at a time when the great and overriding problem was the Soviets' riding roughshod, brutally and terroristically, over Eastern Europe, he proposed a high-level commission, one with Trade Minister Mikoyan of the Soviet Union a prominent member, to visit and advise Greece immediately on its economic future. That, Roosevelt observed, "might have a constructive effect on world opinion at this time." As it happened, at this same time Churchill was pleading with Roosevelt to set up a high-level commission to go to Poland immediately to report on the already corrupted elections taking place. Roosevelt thought it better, however, to settle for "low-level observers already there."58

Twice Roosevelt mentioned to Stalin, once in Churchill's hearing, the importance of the two of them meeting to reach a decision about the future of Hong Kong. India of course loomed up in FDR's mind as the very showpiece of British imperialism. He urged several times to Churchill that Britain give India its independence immediately. Once he sent a report by Chiang Kai Shek, of all people, urging this course. Churchill had to inform Roosevelt that the Congress Party in India represented only high caste Hindus, mostly intellectuals; it did not represent untouchables, Sikhs, Moslems, and the subjects of the royal states. Moreover, the Indian army, a million strong, was largely Moslem.59

Soviet political power fascinated Roosevelt. The attribute that seems to have interested him along with what he saw as the Communist devotion to society, was its unmediated, direct, and highly personal character. He once spoke half humorously, half-enviably of the favored position Stalin had by virtue of the absence of Congress to interfere and hinder. To Stettinius he said: "Woodrow Wilson said we are making the world safe for democracy; but can democracy make the world safe for it?"60

A nice question. But Roosevelt knew the answer. He had learned it during his second term, when the New Deal had suffered not only increased opposition from Congress but also irretrievable setbacks by the Supreme Court. His effort to pack the Court—necessarily by congressional action—failed, and Roosevelt came face to face with the monumental obstacle the American Constitution is to eruptions of Caesarian or Napoleonic power. He had no difficulty in recalling Wilson's lamentable experience with the Senate over the League and the loss of the League to America. But Wilson had made the mistake of going it alone; and, with the presence of Stalin on the world scene, Roosevelt did not have to. Wheeler-Bennett writes:

President Roosevelt's ambition was to establish the United Nations but to superimpose upon it an American-Soviet alliance which should dominate world affairs to the detriment of Britain and France, and to this end he made copious concessions to Marshal Stalin.61

Here too, in a way, FDR was taking Wilson as guide. Wilson had had no true or potentially true ally. He was left with only Britain, France, and Italy as his partners in the making of the new world. And Wilson had from the beginning of the whole war distrusted the motives of the Allied governments. It is of Wilson that Devlin writes here:

Indeed he never lost his distrust of Allied motives.... The Allies did not, he believed, genuinely care about democracy and the right to self-government. He did; and he could proclaim his faith as they had not truly and sincerely done. In his mind it was then, and not before, that the war to rid the world of tyranny and injustice really began. What America touched, she made holy.62

Wilson had had no Stalin; Roosevelt did. Not a perfect partner, to be sure: crude and excessive in uses of power, cruel, too quick to seize and subjugate, but not an imperialist. If, as Hurley said, the future was to be a race between imperialism and democracy, then it would be better to settle for Stalin; unlike Churchill, the very epitome of imperialism, Stalin could be in
time educated to the niceties of world democracy.

In the end Roosevelt succeeded only in starting another war: the Cold War. Not that Stalin would not have started it one way or another under any circumstances short of total defeat by Germany. Of course he would. The dynamic of Leninism was as strong in his veins as Trotsky's—only stated differently. But it was Roosevelt's abject courtship of Stalin that awoke the buds of war and revolution in the West, temporarily dormant under the demands of Hitler's war against the Soviets. It was, let us grant immediately, Wilsonian idealism that Roosevelt believed he was serving; Stalin was only an instrument to be played upon. But no one can doubt that in the way it came out, Roosevelt was the instrument and Stalin the player.

Roosevelt believed and said that by showering kindness and generosity upon Stalin he could get Stalin to work with him in the postwar years for good things. Kindness does sometimes turn away wrath. But in political history—state to state—it is more likely to turn on wrath, or such related emotions as hate and covetousness, more especially if there is a philosophy of history held by the recipient of kindness that foretells the necessary destruction of the benefactor.

Roosevelt triggered Stalin's exploitative reaction and his Cold War against the United States and Britain, even while the war against the Nazis was at full tide, in almost exactly the same way that Neville Chamberlain triggered Hitler's invasion of Poland and the start of World War II. Chamberlain too had said in effect that although others had dismally failed in the attempt, he could handle Hitler. That was just after Munich. Hitler had not incorrectly interpreted Chamberlain's affability and manner of accommodation as signs of weakness. Teheran was in a sense Stalin's Munich, as Munich was Hitler's Teheran. The two despots had the identical experience of seeing for the first time clearly and brilliantly just how weak and divided their enemies were. Perhaps Stalin needed nothing more than the repellent spectacle of Roosevelt's humiliating Churchill to cause him to declare war—cold war, but war—on the West immediately. Certainly it was Teheran, not the later Yalta, that was the setting of the beginning of the Cold War.

Roosevelt left two powerful legacies. They are as visible to those who condemn them as to those who love and follow them. The first is domestic: the legacy of the New Deal. The history of the American economic and political order during the past fifty years is the history of a constantly expanding New Deal with its native attributes of bureaucracy, collectivism, and centralization.

The second is the double standard so many Americans use when they look out at the world and judge its diverse political orders. One standard is used for traditionalist, authoritarian, and friendly states such as South Viet Nam, South Korea, and South Africa. The Roosevelt legacy directs us to be relentless in our castigation of these "corrupt," "decadent," and "tyrannous" orders. It does not, must not, matter that they are often vital military bases for us. Perish the bases rather than our standard of judgment—drawn directly from Never-Land. The other half of the double standard is of course what we apply to the Soviet Union—or to Communist totalitarianism in Cambodia, Cuba, Nicaragua. Here there is no corruption, no decadence, no exploitative capitalism, no class system, and no ethnic or racial tensions. Here, the Roosevelt-born idyll continues; there is a good deal of power to be found; but it is applied to people "who seem really to want to do what is good for their society instead of wanting to do for themselves," to apply Roosevelt on Russia to Cuba, Nicaragua, Cambodia et al.

Moreover, the Soviet Union is "progressive," on the track of history, rather than "reactionary." It has broken clean of the ancient aristocracies and the modern capitalist rulers. Its power may seem harsh on occasion, but it is a "clean" power compared with that wielded by a Syngman Rhee or a Marcos; and from...
Soviet, unlike "reactionary," power, democracy will grow like grass—in time, if we are patient. The reason is perhaps the "almost mystical devotion" the Pol Pots, Castros, and Ortegas—not to forget the Lenins—have toward their peoples.

The farce begun March 18, 1942, goes on and on.