

Joseph Stalin and the Soviet-U.S. Partnership, 1917-1947



Joseph Stalin and Franklin Roosevelt at the 1943 Tehran wartime conference.
(National Museum of the U.S. Navy)

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When Franklin Roosevelt unexpectedly died on April 12, 1945, Joseph Stalin ordered the entire Soviet nation into mourning, something usually reserved for the passing of great Soviet leaders. The next day, *Izvestia* hailed FDR as “the leader of the great democracy across the ocean,” responsible for “improving the social condition of broad masses of people.” *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since the days of the Bolshevik Revolution, commemorated Roosevelt with a lengthy article entitled “The Spokesman for Peace and Security.”¹ In the eyes of Stalin and the Russian people of 1945, Franklin Roosevelt’s United States was not at all seen as an adversary to Soviet Russia but rather as her greatest ally and strategic partner. Not only had the two powers collaborated to liberate the world from fascist tyranny but they also shared a common vision of a permanent post-war peace in which a modern powerful and fully recognized Soviet Union could play a leading role. And yet, less than two years after FDR’s death, his son Elliot would write that a “small group of willful men in London and Washington are anxious to create and foster an atmosphere of war hatred against the Russians.”² According to Elliot Roosevelt, “these saboteurs of international unity” were now deliberately breaking down the “unity of the Big Three, a unity which is the keystone of peace. Franklin Roosevelt chiseled that keystone and set it in place; a great many men have since been chipping away at it, hoping that it will next moment crumble.”³ But while Elliot Roosevelt was chiding members of the Anglo-American political establishment for unraveling his father’s wartime achievements, Stalin continued to grant friendly interviews with American politicians

¹ Susan Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin: Portrait of a Partnership* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2015), 466-67.

² Elliott Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 256.

³ Roosevelt, 251.

and journalists (including Elliot Roosevelt himself) reaffirming his belief that the American-Soviet partnership could remain as vibrant as it had been while FDR was still alive.⁴

Soviet interest in collaborating with the United States had not started in 1941 nor even in 1933 when the United States first officially recognized the Soviet Union. Rather, the idea of cementing a U.S.-U.S.S.R partnership had been part of a much longer-term Bolshevik strategy of both Lenin and Stalin to transform Russia into a modern, industrial power. Not only does this explain Stalin's obstinate attempts to maintain the U.S.-Soviet partnership even in the early intense phases of the Cold War, but also his acute understanding of the difference between true American interests as represented by Franklin Roosevelt and those of imperial Britain so fiercely defended by Winston Churchill, a difference that FDR would make sure to amplify at the wartime conferences. In the end, the spirit of productive partnership which had played such a crucial role in defeating Nazi Germany would evaporate in the wake of what Western analysts labeled a "Cold War" brought about in large part after FDR's death by a new Anglo-American "special relationship" which sought to replace collaboration with confrontation.

U.S.-Soviet relations 1917-1939: "an issue of paramount national importance"

Joseph Stalin had a passionate interest in transforming the Soviet Union from a rural, peasant-based economy into a modern industrial power. In 1930 he wrote that "The USSR will be a first-class country with the largest scale, technologically equipped industrial and agricultural production ... No longer will we have 'miserable' Russia ... We'll have a powerful and prosperous advanced Russia." From this standpoint, Stalin repeatedly referenced his admiration

⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 311-12.

for the work of Peter the Great and Peter's attempt to rapidly modernize Russia by importing Western science and culture.⁵ A crucial feature of this strategy was Stalin's controversial policy of Socialism in One Country which was a refutation of Leon Trotsky's theory that no socialist country could achieve true communism without the overthrow of all western capitalist systems in a "permanent revolution." Stalin, however, had no interest in isolating the Soviet Union from the West and postponing its industrialization pending unlikely socialist revolutions abroad.⁶ Instead, he insisted "that the building of a complete socialist society in such a backward country like Russia without 'state support' of technologically and economically more developed countries is impossible."⁷ This is precisely where the United States could play a key role.

Both Lenin and Stalin made no attempt to hide their admiration of the spirit of "American efficiency" and the "American style of work."⁸ Very early on, Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership had come to the conclusion that a partnership with the United States could be the key ingredient to Soviet success and therefore aggressively sought out collaboration with the Americans for mutual benefit. A remarkable January 1919 document issued by the Council of the People's Commissars (the chief executive body of the new Soviet government) stated unambiguously that such an American partnership was "an issue of paramount national importance, and the fate of Soviet Russia depends on its successful resolution." The document specified four areas of common interest: first, Soviet Russia and the United States could both benefit by developing the USSR as a market for American industrial products; second, modernizing Russian industry would require foreign capital investments which the U.S. could

⁵ Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin : A Study in Twentieth Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 102-03.

⁶ Ian Gray, *Stalin: Man of History* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979), 216-19.

⁷ Ree, 89-90.

⁸ Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and coexistence; the history of Soviet foreign policy, 1917-67* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 211.

also provide; third, a U.S.-Soviet partnership could “weaken English influence in Europe”; and fourth, both countries had a joint security interest in checking Japanese imperial interests.⁹ Later in a 1931 interview with writer Emil Ludwig, Stalin explained that even though the U.S. was a capitalist country, American “simplicity strikes a responsive chord in our hearts” and that “the habits prevailing in its industry, the practices existing in productive processes have an element of democracy about them which cannot be said of the old European capitalist countries ...”¹⁰

Even though the United States had refused to recognize the Soviet government as legitimate, the Bolsheviks still initiated an aggressive drive to establish economic relations with top American companies by sending Russian engineer Ludwig Martens to New York in 1919 to set up a “Soviet Bureau.” Despite the various trade embargos against the Soviet Union at the time, the initiative proved highly successful as Martens was able to establish contact with over 1,000 American firms including American Locomotive, Baldwin Locomotive, and International Harvester.¹¹ Even though the “Red scare” was still sweeping the United States in the 1920s, American-Soviet economic ties increased rapidly throughout the same period precisely as Lenin and Stalin had hoped. Soviet diplomat and later ambassador to the United States Maxim Litvinov even proposed a plan to have the United States assume all Soviet foreign debts thereby putting the U.S. in the position of being the Soviet Union’s sole debtor.¹² From 1923-1930, sales of U.S. goods to the Soviet Union saw a twenty-fold increase with the President Coolidge’s Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover brokering long-term credits to the Soviet Union in 1927. By 1931 American companies were responsible for a full twenty-five percent of Russian imports while

⁹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 249.

¹⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 267-68.

¹¹ Katherine A. Siegel, *Loans and Legitimacy: The Evolution of Soviet-American Relations, 1919-1933* (Topeka, KA: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2.

¹² Siegel, 45.

one-fourth of all exports of American industrial equipment were going to the Soviet Union. Moscow also enjoyed credits from large American firms and banks like Chase, Guaranty Trust, and Equitable Trust.¹³

Consequently, Stalin and the Soviets saw the long awaited 1933 recognition of their government by the United States as the biggest diplomatic coup since the 1917 revolution. The recognition was met with great celebration in Russia with newspapers carrying front page photos of FDR portrayed as a hero of the working class. The new American Ambassador William Bullitt was hosted at a grand dinner in the Kremlin, a treatment that no diplomats from other countries had enjoyed. Said Stalin to Bullitt, “President Roosevelt is today, in spite of being the leader of a capitalist nation, one of the most popular men in the Soviet Union.”¹⁴ Further, the Soviet government pledged to cease supporting any activities within the United States that would “injure the tranquility, prosperity, order or security of any part of United States,” effectively banning all agitational Comintern organizing in the U.S.¹⁵ In a well-circulated 1934 English-language interview with H.G. Wells in *The New Statesman*, Stalin was sure to praise the “personal qualities of Roosevelt, his initiative, courage and determination ... as one of the strongest figures among all the captains of the contemporary capitalist world.”¹⁶ Even during Stalin’s bloody purges of 1936-38 where Bolshevik leaders were executed for being accused of working for foreign intelligence services, the United States was one of only two nations (the other France) which was not accused of recruiting Russian leaders as spies.¹⁷

¹³ Siegal, 140.

¹⁴ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 154-55.

¹⁵ Ulam, 213.

¹⁶ H.G. Wells, “H G Wells: ‘It seems to me that I am more to the Left than you, Mr. Stalin’,” *The New Statesman*, October 27, 1934. <https://www.newstatesman.com/uncategorized/2014/04/h-g-wells-it-seems-me-i-am-more-left-you-mr-stalin>

¹⁷ Ulam, 240.

Stalin seeks allies

There was, however, one area of collaboration with the Soviet Union that FDR and the United States would not consider in this period, namely that of negotiating any military treaties or alliances. After its invasion of Manchuria in 1931, not only was Japan seen as a major threat to Russian interests in the Far East but a revanchist Germany under Adolf Hitler could potentially strike east and attack the Soviet Union at any point. As the clouds of war descended over Europe and Asia, it became clear to Stalin that the United States had no immediate intention of entering these conflicts due to the strong internal political opposition of the U.S. Congress and American population to becoming involved in foreign wars. With isolationism constraining American intervention, Stalin would therefore have to look elsewhere for any guarantees to prevent (or at least postpone) the horrors of war from yet again being brought onto Russian soil.

When Hitler seized Austria and the Sudetenland in early 1939, Stalin delivered a speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress insisting that “Combined, the nonaggressive democratic states are unquestionably stronger” than Hitler’s Germany but “England and France have rejected the policy of collective security and have taken up a position of neutrality.”¹⁸ Stalin had ordered Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov to propose a joint treaty between France, Britain, Poland, Russia, Romania and Turkey to stop Hitler. Tragically, Chamberlain, who had “a profound distrust of Russia,” would only agree to having Great Britain support Poland if it were invaded, hardly a bold allied initiative to stop Hitler.¹⁹ To no avail, Litvinov spent six weeks trying to get some kind of agreement from both the French and British ambassadors for an allied treaty against Hitler. Finally on April 16, Stalin boldly proposed a joint Soviet-French-

¹⁸ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 161.

¹⁹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 162.

British pact to declare war on Germany if *any* nation between the Baltic and the Mediterranean were to be attacked. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the end of July that British and French negotiators finally decided to embark on a slow freighter to Leningrad, clearly stalling the negotiations.²⁰ Stalin also learned at this time that the only reason that the British were even negotiating with him was due to the pressure that FDR had been putting on Chamberlain to do so.²¹

London's intransigence came as no surprise to Stalin as the British establishment's view of the matter was made fairly clear by Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax who, after meeting with Hitler, had publicly commented that "By destroying communism in his country [Hitler] had barred its road to Western Europe ... Germany could rightly be regarded as a bulwark of the West against communism."²² As Litvinov continued in vain to achieve the desired treaty with France and Britain, Stalin felt compelled to pursue another course in a desperate attempt to prolong the much-dreaded war from reaching Soviet soil. On May 3, Stalin replaced Foreign Commissar Litvinov with Vyacheslav Molotov who had been known for his favorable view of Germany. The message was clear: since a treaty with the western democracies appeared to be off the table and the United States was, for the moment, out of the equation, the Soviet Union would gamble on a deal with Hitler in an attempt to stay out of the war. Still constrained by isolationist pressures, FDR delivered a secret appeal to Stalin via the U.S. ambassador on August 15 advising against the Hitler-Stalin Pact. But with Hitler desirous of invading Poland in early autumn, frenzied diplomacy had already been set into motion by Molotov and German Ambassador Schulenberg. It is important to note that during this period the Soviets twice

²⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 172.

²¹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 160-63.

²² Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 165.

appealed to Lord Halifax to leave London and travel to Moscow to negotiate an alliance. Twice he refused.²³ Years later, Molotov would reminisce that at the time Britain “was interested in pushing us into a conflict with the Germans as quickly as possible.”²⁴ The Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed and sealed before the end of the Summer of 1939.

As distasteful as it was, the brief period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact ultimately did keep the war from Russian soil for almost two years. In Stalin’s eyes, he desperately needed the time to solidify the necessary Russian industrial capacity to sustain a war effort against the Soviet Union if it should occur. However, during this period Stalin made the Soviet Union into a virtual satellite of Hitler’s Germany in terms of trade and diplomacy. Stalin had convinced himself that if he continued to placate Hitler in every way possible, then somehow war could be avoided. This delusion was so strong that when faced with all evidence of the coming German invasion in the spring of 1941, Stalin absolutely refused to acknowledge it. He even completely ignored repeated warnings by Soviet intelligence that the Luftwaffe had been spotted in over 180 overflights over Russian territory clearly aimed at identifying future German targets.²⁵ When Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, finally did occur on June 22, Stalin was so stunned by the dramatic turn of events that he literally disappeared from the Soviet public for eleven days locked in his study.²⁶

²³ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 168.

²⁴ Albert Resis, ed., *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1993), 28.

²⁵ Ulam, 310-12.

²⁶ Ulam, 315-16.

The U.S.-Soviet partnership restored

When he finally did emerge to the public, Stalin issued a powerful challenge to the Soviet people to now engage in a “Great Patriotic War” to “merge the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for their independence and democratic liberties.”²⁷ After languishing for twenty-two months under the delusive constraints of the Hitler-Stalin pact, Stalin could now put the ever more urgent partnership with the United States back on the table as the vital ingredient to save the Soviet Union from annihilation. Within a month of the German invasion, Roosevelt dispatched his close advisor Harry Hopkins to Moscow to discuss unconditional American Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union. Not unlike Ambassador Bullitt’s arrival in Moscow in 1933, Hopkins’ meetings with Stalin that summer were triumphantly plastered all over the front pages of the Soviet press. Stalin was so appreciative of the U.S. assistance that he told Hopkins that he would even welcome American troops onto Russian soil under their own command to fight the Nazis.²⁸ Stalin also made a point of repeatedly stressing to Hopkins that he considered FDR to be the most powerful voice for the common man in the world at that time.²⁹ When the details of the Lend-Lease aid were finally worked out at the Moscow Conference two months later with British Supply Minister Lord Beaverbrook and Averill Harriman, Stalin jumped out of his chair crying out, “Now we shall win the war!”³⁰

But the extension of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union was not at all popular among certain establishment elements in the United States and Great Britain. Missouri Senator Harry Truman’s opposition was perhaps the most blatant when he asserted that “if we see that

²⁷ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 192.

²⁸ Susan Butler, editor, *My Dear Mr. Stalin : The Complete Correspondence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 38.

²⁹ Butler, *My Dear Mr. Stalin*, 39.

³⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 209.

Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible.”³¹ Winston Churchill had expressed a similar sentiment in mid-August while meeting with FDR to consolidate the Atlantic Charter insisting that the Soviet Union would soon collapse under the German attack, therefore requesting that all Lend-Lease aid should go to Britain not to the Soviets. This British assessment was apparently so strong at the Atlantic Charter conference that it provoked Elliot Roosevelt to later muse “whether it was the British Empire’s purpose to see the Nazis and the Russians cancel each other out, while Britain grew strong.”³² Of course, this was precisely the same assessment of British intentions that Molotov had later recounted when reflecting on his diplomatic activities of 1939.

With Roosevelt, however, things were different. The signing of the first Moscow Protocol on October 1, 1941 authorizing over one billion dollars’ worth of military aid to Russia made clear to Stalin that FDR was determined to fully back the Soviet Union in the war against Hitler. Another important indication to Stalin of FDR’s intentions was his deliberate circumvention of many ideologically-driven American diplomats who embraced the anti-Soviet sentiment which had dominated the U.S. State Department since the Wilson administration.³³ Roosevelt’s willingness to directly confront and neutralize anti-Soviet sentiment in his own government was something greatly appreciated by Stalin and made the wartime collaboration congenial and efficient. This was made crystal clear by Roosevelt’s assignment of newly promoted General Philip Faymonville to exclusively oversee all Lend-Lease agreements and

³¹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 197.

³² Roosevelt, 30, 34.

³³ Mary Glantz, "An Officer and a Diplomat? the Ambiguous Position of Philip R. Faymonville and United States-Soviet Relations, 1941-1943," *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 1 (01, 2008): 146-51..

allocations and report to FDR directly, thus bypassing the traditional State Department chain of command. Faymonville had been the U.S. military attaché since 1933 and was well-known in Moscow as a strong advocate of U.S.-Soviet collaboration. As such, he was greatly admired by Stalin and other Soviet officials as being constantly at odds with the U.S. diplomatic bureaucracy in Moscow, including U.S. Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt who shared Winston Churchill's opinion that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse in the wake of the German invasion and that therefore Lend-Lease to Russia was a complete waste of military supplies. Both Ambassador Steinhardt and his successor Admiral William Standley were essentially side-lined by FDR throughout the war, being left out of all important discussions between Washington and Moscow.³⁴ Later, while traveling with Elliot to the Cairo wartime conference in 1943, FDR confided to his son that he felt obligated to carry out such foreign diplomacy behind the backs of many State Department officials because he considered them to be completely untrustworthy. Comparing the permanent bureaucracy of the State Department with that of the British Foreign office, FDR insisted that "some of those career diplomats aren't in accord with what they know I think. They should be working for Winston. As a matter of fact, a lot of the time, they *are*."³⁵

The wartime alliance

With the December 7th Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States became fully engaged in the Second World War. In what would later become known as the Grand Alliance, the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China were now allied to confront the global fascist threat. However, in the spring of 1942 the situation still looked bleak for the Soviet Union as the Nazi onslaught, although stalled, was still on the offensive deep inside Russia.

³⁴ David Mayers, "The Great Patriotic War, FDR's Embassy Moscow, and Soviet—US Relations," *The International History Review* 33, no. 2 (2011): 299–333.

³⁵ Roosevelt, 204-05.

Worse, Hitler considered all Slavs to be racially inferior and had slated them for extermination. Already, millions of Russian soldiers and citizens had been slaughtered in the first months of the war. It should therefore come as no surprise that in his first meeting with FDR in Washington that May, Soviet Ambassador Vyacheslav Molotov pushed hard for a commitment from the American president to open a second front against Hitler from the West. Roosevelt assured Molotov that the second front was a top priority of the United States and that it would take place within the year. FDR then posed something further to the Soviet ambassador. He explained to Molotov that he envisioned a new, post war organization in which the Soviet Union would play a leading role as one of “four policemen” of the post-war world. Along with the U.S., Britain, and China the four powers would be allied to impose a lasting peace, with the use of force if necessary. Needless to say, Stalin was delighted when informed of the proposal confirming that “Roosevelt is absolutely right and his position will be fully supported by the Soviet Government.”³⁶ Stalin understood that implicit in the four policemen proposal was precisely what the Bolsheviks had envisioned since the 1917 Revolution: a partnership with the United States whereby the Soviet Union could secure the peace and finally emerge as a respected world power.

It was not until late 1943 that Stalin first had the occasion to meet Roosevelt in person at the Teheran conference of the Big Three. The second front which the Soviets had so desperately insisted upon had been consistently delayed by Churchill and his commanders who insisted that the allies invade Europe through the Balkans instead of France in order to keep the Red Army out of central Europe.³⁷ In what would become a leitmotif in the conference discussions, FDR

³⁶ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 236-38.

³⁷ Roosevelt, 84-85.

went out of his way to side with Stalin on such matters often making Churchill the brunt of jokes and friendly derision much to the amusement of the Soviet leader. Before the Teheran conference had even begun, Roosevelt had made sure to hold no less than three private, informal meetings with Stalin *without* Winston Churchill.³⁸ As FDR had written to Churchill earlier, "...I can personally handle Stalin better than either your foreign office or my State Department. Stalin hates the guts of all your top people. He thinks he likes me better, and I hope he will continue to do so."³⁹ Heated squabbles between Stalin and Churchill at the Big Three wartime conferences and Stalin's reliance on FDR's interventions to often settle them certainly support FDR's claim. In Stalin's view, Churchill was a virulent anti-Bolshevik who would turn his back on an ally in an instant to serve imperialist interests while Roosevelt, on the other hand, was a representative of true American capitalist interests which had benefited the Soviet Union in the past, even if under strained conditions.

Aside from the issue of the second front and other pressing military matters at hand, the Big Three held extensive discussions about the shape of the post-war world. Stalin's clearly stated concern in all of the discussions was consistent and simple: the Soviet Union would require twenty to thirty years of peace to rebuild her economy after the war and considered the peaceful collaboration with the Grand Alliance, especially the United States, as the most efficient means to do it.⁴⁰ After all, said Stalin at Teheran, "The United States...is a country of machines. Without the use of those machines through Lend-Lease, we would lose the war."⁴¹ Stalin was also acutely aware that he and Roosevelt's views on the configuration of the post-war world

³⁸ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 73.

³⁹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 232.

⁴⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 260-61.

⁴¹ Roosevelt, 196.

diverged widely from those of Winston Churchill, who was adamant on maintaining British colonial power after the war as well as checking the growth of Soviet influence generally. Reflecting FDR's views, Henry Hopkins wrote that "We simply cannot organize the world between the British and ourselves without bringing the Russians in as equal partners ... The days of the policy of the 'white man's burden' are over."⁴² Stalin understood this and therefore went out of his way, perhaps counterintuitively at times, to accommodate Roosevelt's post-war plans and institutions. Remarkably, this included full Soviet participation in the FDR-inspired April 1944 Bretton Woods monetary conference to create the U.S. dollar dominated post-war financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Although the Soviets almost brought about a crisis by wavering on full participation in the I.M.F., at the last-minute Stalin did finally agree to pay the Soviet's share of gold into the system making sure it was known that the U.S.S.R. "was very anxious to cooperate with the rest of the United Nations in post-war matters and felt there was special need for some stabilized monetary system after the war."⁴³ An important factor in Stalin's acquiescence was that there had been ongoing negotiations with the United States over a substantial post-war loan to the Soviet Union to purchase American manufactured goods. Soviet officials had been insistent that without the large American credits, the Soviet Union would not be able to develop the volume of foreign trade and imports required for post-war reconstruction.⁴⁴ Apparently, FDR approved the idea (which at one point had included a thirty-year \$6 billion low interest loan) but the State Department somehow neglected to inform the Soviets of Roosevelt's positive response.⁴⁵

⁴² Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 96, 244.

⁴³ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 292-93.

⁴⁴ Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, "Capitalism's Fellow Traveler: The Soviet Union, Bretton Woods, and the Cold War, 1944-1958," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 2 (2014): 296..

⁴⁵ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 349.

As to the future peace, Stalin was understandably obsessed with the idea that Germany could rise again to pose yet another invasion threat. He was therefore intent on creating buffers along the Soviet Union's European borders to protect his country. While Hitler's treatment of his conquered white European victims on the Western front may have been brutal, it paled in comparison with the racially motivated war of extermination that the Nazis carried out against the "inferior" Slavs in the East. This had been the main reason for Stalin's creation of a Pan-Slav committee in 1941 as the principal victims of Hitler's eastern advance had been Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. As he told Yugoslavia's Tito in April of 1945, "Give them [Germany] twelve to fifteen years and they'll be on their feet again ...this is why the unity of the Slavs is important."⁴⁶ At a private meeting with Eastern European leaders at his Dacha, Stalin insisted that his new Soviet form of Pan-Slavism was not like the old Tsarist policy of Russification and subjugation: "Our Slavophilism is something completely different—the unification of the Slavic peoples as equals for the common defense of their existence and future..."⁴⁷

This was the backdrop to Stalin's absolute insistence on a "Soviet friendly" post-war Poland at the wartime conferences. Twice in thirty years Germany had used the Polish corridor to invade Russia and Stalin was determined that it would not happen again.⁴⁸ Roosevelt was quite aware of Stalin's security concern regarding Poland and therefore allowed for certain concessions, like granting the post-war Polish government be built around an expansion of the pro-Soviet Provisional Government. In turn, in the final declaration at Yalta, Stalin conceded that the new Polish government "be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as

⁴⁶ Roberts, 210-11.

⁴⁷ Roberts, 236.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 375-76.

possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot.”⁴⁹ Stalin further insisted that he had absolutely no interest in “exporting” communism or the Soviet system into Eastern Europe as a whole. “Export of revolution is nonsense,” he told American publisher Roy Howard, “each country, if it so desires will make its own revolution, and if no such desire exists, no revolution will occur.”⁵⁰ In an expanded version of his Socialism in One Country doctrine which he called the New Democracy, Stalin even insisted that “Revolution is no longer necessary everywhere ...socialism is even possible under and English King.”⁵¹ Coherent with the New Democracy policy, Stalin had dissolved the Comintern in 1943, an important move that was quite consciously aimed at strengthening the wartime collaboration with FDR as well as other western allies.⁵²

By the end of the Yalta conference in February 1945, all major issues dealing with the post-war world had been tentatively agreed upon by the Big Three, including the establishment of the United Nations and its basic structure. Despite all of the protests and controversies that had come up at the conference including the Polish question and the final draft of the Declaration on Liberated Europe, Stalin ultimately heeded FDR's council and made the necessary compromises since, in the words of Molotov, “It was in our benefit to stay allied with America.”⁵³ FDR had also gone out of his way to make clear to Stalin “that the United States and Great Britain were not allied in one common bloc against the Soviet Union.”⁵⁴ Roosevelt even chose to brush aside the Warsaw uprising tragedy accepting Stalin's explanation that the Soviets had repeatedly warned the London Poles not to carry out an armed rebellion against the Nazi

⁴⁹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 416.

⁵⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 260.

⁵¹ Roberts, 246-47.

⁵² Butler, *Dear Mr. Stalin*, 131-32.

⁵³ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 431.

⁵⁴ Roosevelt, 206.

occupiers as the Red Army was in no position to provide support or take Warsaw at that point. Even Averill Harriman would later admit that the entire uprising affair “was the London Poles thinking they could put it over on the Russians by seizing Warsaw.”⁵⁵ At the conclusion of the Yalta conference, the Soviet press was again filled with tributes to Roosevelt extolling the conference as “the biggest political event of modern times ...a new example of coordinated solutions of complicated questions in the interest of peace and democracy.”⁵⁶ As the war drew to a close in the spring of 1945, Stalin was quite confident that the Soviet partnership with the United States was on solid ground, solid enough to secure a peaceful, post-war world order in which the Soviet Union would be able to rebuild from the devastation of the Great Patriotic War which had ravaged the country and claimed the lives of over twenty million Russian souls.

The death of FDR and confrontation from the West

On April 12, 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died unexpectedly at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia. When informed of the startling news, observers present with Stalin noted that the Soviet leader was visibly shocked and distressed. Stalin insisted to U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman that “President Roosevelt has died but his cause must live on... We shall support President Truman with all our forces and all our will.” Even the usually cautious Molotov expressed a firm conviction that Truman would continue on as FDR had wished.⁵⁷ But within days of Roosevelt’s death, two events occurred that were a harbinger of what lay ahead. First, on April 20 Molotov had traveled to Washington to meet Truman in person. Although there are different versions of the two meetings, Molotov later recalled that Truman had “a very anti-Soviet mindset” and “began talking to me in such an imperious tone!” when discussing Poland

⁵⁵ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 379.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 429.

⁵⁷ Roberts, 267.

and other post-war matters. Although Truman pledged to Molotov that he would continue to uphold the Yalta agreements, Molotov observed that “He was far from having Roosevelt’s intellect.”⁵⁸ The second incident occurred on May 11. With Germany having surrendered, Truman abruptly ordered all Lend-Lease activity cancelled with no warning or notification to the Soviet Union. Although upon further consultation Truman rescinded his order, Stalin saw the move as a clear affront to the Soviet Union.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, more intense conflicts arose at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco. The entire process had been thrown into jeopardy due to apparent Soviet objections to the American stance regarding the extent of the veto powers of the Security Council over member nations. With Truman’s approval, FDR confidant Henry Hopkins was dispatched to Moscow at the end of May where he was granted with no less than six personal meetings with Stalin to iron out the U.N. issue, among others. As it turned out, Molotov and Gromyko had brokered all of the discussions in San Francisco without Stalin being fully informed of some of the minutiae. As Hopkins filled Stalin in on Roosevelt’s intentions for the U.N. Charter and the exact issues at hand, Stalin gladly agreed to the American position on the veto issue again demonstrating that with direct and personal dialogue, conflicts and misunderstandings could be settled in the interest of maintaining peace and stability for the post-war world.⁶⁰

Even while these and other conflicts were brewing, Stalin and Molotov approached the July Big Three conference on post-war arrangements at Potsdam with optimism. One particular point of discussion was Stalin’s reaffirmation to the Allies of his intention to invade Manchuria

⁵⁸ Resis, 55.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 473.

⁶⁰ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 487.

and declare war on Japan “two to three months” after peace had been established on the western front. He had made this pledge to Roosevelt back in October of 1943 in the interest of cementing his alliance with the United States as well as securing Soviet interests in the Far East. The Soviet invasion of Manchuria would involve over a million and a half troops, 5,500 tanks, and 3,900 aircraft and, as promised, was assembled in early July slated to attack by the beginning of August.⁶¹ Importantly, after the Potsdam conference Truman acknowledged that he saw the Soviet invasion as a critical part of ending the war against Japan sooner than expected.⁶² Stalin also appeared relatively unfazed when Truman confided to him privately at Potsdam that the United States had successfully built and tested “the bomb,” although Truman provided no hint that the United States had any intention of using it let alone when. Across the board, Stalin and his team of diplomats regarded the Potsdam conference as another successful meeting of the Big Three proving again that, despite heated disagreements and conflicts, the alliance could still be maintained to charter a course of mutual peace and security.⁶³

It is certainly a curious and probably not coincidental historical fact that the Truman team decided to drop the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima immediately *after* the Potsdam conference had concluded and exactly two days before Stalin commenced the Red Army invasion of Manchuria declaring war on the Japan on August 8. The second bomb which obliterated Nagasaki was dropped the next day. Both Stalin and Molotov were horrified by the surprise event, shocked that their American allies would carry out such a momentous operation without even hinting about it to their supposed wartime allies who had spent months preparing the massive attack on the Japanese army in Manchuria. According to his daughter, Stalin became

⁶¹ Roberts, 281, 285.

⁶² Roberts, 289.

⁶³ Roberts, 279.

physically ill when informed of the bombings, later claiming that the event had “shaken the world” by altering the balance of power.⁶⁴ Molotov was even more blunt about the nuclear attacks commenting later that “the bombs dropped on Japan were not aimed at Japan but rather at the Soviet Union.”⁶⁵ To make matters worse, Truman refused Stalin’s request for the Red Army to accept the Japanese surrender on the island of Hokkaido which, according to the Soviets, would have been of “special importance to Russian public opinion.” Although stung by the refusal, Stalin chose not to press the issue in the interest of avoiding any further confrontation with the United States.⁶⁶

The first months of 1946 saw an absolute escalation by the British and their co-thinkers in the United States in what became a concerted drive to end any meaningful collaboration with the Soviet Union. First, there was syndicated columnist Drew Pearson’s press leak warning of a secret soviet spy network operating in Canada and the United States that had stolen atomic secrets in order to build their own atomic bomb. The Canadian government’s confirmation of the network and the subsequent media hysteria covering the story spread panic among Americans. Although the Soviets certainly did have extensive espionage and surveillance activities in North America centered around the Manhattan Project, the untimely release of Pearson’s “exposé” ensured an even greater fissure in U.S.-Soviet relations.⁶⁷ Then, Winston Churchill’s so-called “Iron Curtain” speech on March 6, 1946 in Fulton Missouri began to confirm Stalin’s worst fears. The former prime minister, clearly speaking on behalf of the British establishment and with Truman accompanying him on the dais, laid out a chilling new strategy for the post-war

⁶⁴ Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 495.

⁶⁵ Resis, 58.

⁶⁶ Roberts, 293-94.

⁶⁷ Campbell Craig, and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War : The Politics of Insecurity* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 67-68.

world. Instead of the close partnership between the United States and the Soviet Union which had characterized the Stalin-FDR relationship, now the world must be dominated by “the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples ...a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.” Churchill elaborated that this new “special relationship” must now confront the “Communist parties or fifth columns [which] constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization.”⁶⁸ Churchill’s not so subtle warning that the failure to challenge the Soviet Union from a position of overwhelming military power was akin to appeasing Hitler in the 1930s was certainly not missed by Stalin and the Soviets. This was, of course, exactly what Stalin had feared all along and what Roosevelt had worked so diligently to avoid: an alliance of capitalist Anglo-American power aimed at a confrontation with the Soviet Union. Although Stalin may have been overly paranoid about this at times, it is important to remember that Churchill had actually designed a contingency plan in May 1945 (“Operation Unthinkable”) in which the U.S. and Britain would join forces militarily to drive the Red Army out of Poland.⁶⁹ To Stalin, Churchill’s speech was not just empty words. An article in *Izvestiya* the following day was quick to point out that Churchill’s use of the term “Iron Curtain” was the same term used by Josef Goebbels when referring to the Red Army’s liberation of Eastern Europe during the war. In the Russian media, Stalin directly accused Churchill of promoting Anglo-Saxon world domination comparing the new alliance with the anti-Bolshevik coalition that had attempted to aid White Russians against the Soviets during the Russian Civil War.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Winston Churchill, “The Sinews of War,” March 5, 1946 speech at Fulton Missouri, *The International Churchill Society*, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>

⁶⁹ Mayers, 26.

⁷⁰ Roberts, 308.

The remainder of 1946 witnessed increased tensions over Soviet troop presence in Iran and Turkey. In the case of Iran, Stalin decided to withdraw as “the presence of Soviet troops in Iran undercut the foundations of our liberationist policies in Europe and Asia.” The Turkish situation, however, was somewhat more complex. Stalin had pushed hard to keep a Soviet presence there which had more to do with the historic Russian desire to have access to the Dardanelles than anything relating to the present conflicts with the West.⁷¹ But even during these heated confrontations throughout 1946, Stalin insisted that the continued collaboration of the Grand Alliance was the way to preserve the peace and realize FDR’s post-war vision. Late in the year Elliott Roosevelt conducted a live interview with Stalin in Moscow asking him bluntly if there would be any benefit in convening another conference of the Big Three. Stalin replied that not only should there be such a conference, but *several* conferences should be held to continue to iron out problems and conflicts, insisting that maintaining a close alliance with the United States ought to be “possible to an even greater extent during peacetime.”⁷² It is worth noting that Elliot Roosevelt’s book *As He Saw It* warning about the “small group of willful men in London and Washington” out to sabotage the U.S.-Soviet partnership cited at the beginning of this report was also published at this time. In a September 1946 interview with journalist Alexander Werth, Stalin continued to insist that peaceful and productive coexistence with the West was still possible and refused to agree with the analysis that the United States was part of a grand capitalist conspiracy to encircle the Soviet Union. In October, Stalin also told Hugh Bailey of the United Press that he disagreed with a recent speech by Secretary of State Byrnes claiming that

⁷¹ Roberts, 309.

⁷² Christian F. Ostermann, editor, *Stalin and the Cold War, 1945-1953*, Cold War International History Project conference document (Yale University, 23-26 September 1999), 347-49.

tensions had risen in Soviet-U.S. relations. If there were any fear of war, Stalin asserted, it was because of the confrontationist policies of “Churchill and his friends.”⁷³

The logic of the Cold War sets in

Perhaps the “red line” marking the true beginning of the Cold War was drawn in March 1947 by President Harry Truman. In a speech to the United States Congress, the president announced a new American foreign policy of supporting “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures.”⁷⁴ Although he never mentioned the Soviet Union by name, the “Truman Doctrine” speech was even more disturbing to Stalin than Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” one at Fulton, Missouri as it clearly called for the United States to unilaterally and without warning intervene into foreign countries to stop alleged “outside” threats. But Stalin still refused to engage in any head-to-head confrontation with an American president and remained silent after the speech. Further, Stalin proceeded to have a pleasant and productive meeting with the new Secretary of State George Marshall on April 15th assuring him that the ongoing deliberations of the Council of Foreign Ministers organized at Potsdam would be successful despite the many disagreements. “On all the main questions—democratization, political organization, economic unity and reparations—it is possible to achieve compromise,”⁷⁵ Stalin told Marshall. At the same time Stalin granted a long interview with republican U.S. presidential candidate Harold Stassen again recalling the productive relationship that he had enjoyed with President Roosevelt. “When he met Roosevelt and discussed military matters,” Stassen wrote, “he and Roosevelt did not curse each other as monopolists or totalitarians ...

⁷³ Roberts, 311-12.

⁷⁴ Roberts, 313.

⁷⁵ Roberts, 313-14.

[Stalin said] if two different systems can cooperate during wartime, then why can't they cooperate during peacetime."⁷⁶

The Truman Doctrine would also have an unfortunate effect on the Marshall Plan for rebuilding war torn Europe. In the beginning of July 1947, a British-French-Soviet conference was convened in Paris to work out a structure for how the American European Recovery Program would be administered. Still eager to pursue any prospect of American economic aid, Stalin was initially open to the idea of Soviet participation in the Marshall Plan and sent Molotov and a delegation of one hundred officials to Paris to join the deliberations. But unknown to Molotov was the fact that State Departments Director of Policy Planning George Kennan had previously made sure that the program had been written in such a way "that the Russian satellite countries would either exclude themselves by unwillingness to accept the proposed conditions or agree to abandon the exclusive orientations of their economies." State Department official Jefferson Caffrey was even more blunt when writing to Marshall that "The British feel that Russian participation would tend greatly to complicate things and that it might be best if the Russians refused invitation."⁷⁷ Very similar to the Truman Administration's contrivance of the Baruch Plan the previous year, Kennan and his Cold War friends wanted to ensure that Soviet participation in the Marshall Plan would be dead on arrival by imposing demands on Stalin that they already knew he would never agree to.⁷⁸ It is no accident that the July 1947 issue of Foreign Affairs magazine published Kennan's famous "X Article" precisely at this time in which he anonymously detailed the new policy of Anglo-American "containment" of the "mystical

⁷⁶ Ostermann, 386-91.

⁷⁷ Sanchez-Sibony, 299.

⁷⁸ Craig and Logevall, 75-76. In an effort to appear to be honoring FDR's wish for post-war international atomic control, Democratic Party figure Bernard Baruch was tasked by the Truman administration to draw up a United Nations plan for controlling the atomic bomb that posed such obvious constraints on the USSR that they were sure to refuse it.

Messianic movement” operating out of the Kremlin supposedly bent on world domination. In the article, Kennan audaciously dismissed everything that FDR and Stalin had understood about the nature of the Soviet-U.S. partnership asserting that there “can never be on Moscow’s side any sincere assumption of a community of aims between the Soviet Union and powers which are regarded as capitalist.”⁷⁹ Right on cue, the Soviet Union pulled out of the Marshall Plan discussions and began to pressure all of her Eastern European allies to do the same. Molotov accused France and Britain of using American economic aid to create “a new organization standing above the European countries and intervening in the internal affairs of the countries of Europe.”⁸⁰ At the United Nations, Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinskii denounced the Marshall Plan as nothing but a “variant of the Truman Doctrine” and “an attempt to split Europe into two camps.”⁸¹

At the same time, Stalin decided to organize the so-called “Cominform” (Communist Information Buro) which was essentially a resurrection of the old Comintern that he had disbanded in 1943 in the interest of placating his western allies and strengthening his relationship with the United States. Now, a mere four years later, Soviet leaders publicly labeled the United States “the principle leading force in the imperialist camp” against which “anti-imperialist and anti-fascist forces” must unite.⁸² In response to the U.S. Senate’s June 1948 passing of the Vandenberg Resolution which paved the way for the creation of the NATO bloc against the Soviet Union, the official Soviet response was that the new American foreign policy had

⁷⁹ George Kennan (“X”), “The sources of Soviet conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, No 4; Vol. 25 (1947): 566-582. https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/a0f03730-dde8-4f06-a6ed-d740770dc423/publishable_en.pdf

⁸⁰ Roberts, 316.

⁸¹ Roberts, 317.

⁸² Roberts, 318.

returned “to the old anti-Soviet course, designed to unloose war and forcibly to institute world domination by Britain and the United States.”⁸³

Thirty years of a productive U.S.-Soviet partnership had tragically come to an end.

The Russian-U.S. partnership vs. geopolitics

As difficult and complicated as it may have been, the pioneering alliance of Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Russia with Franklin Roosevelt’s United States proved that “win-win” collaboration was a far more productive method of statecraft than the arcane geopolitics of what Stalin called “the old European capitalist countries.” In regards to the United States, this was something that Lenin and Stalin clearly understood from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution and which the Cold War preemptively aborted, depriving the Soviet Union of the economic trade and collaboration with the powerful post-war United States economy which it had so relentlessly sought. Yet, Americans would be told for the next fifty years that the predominantly Anglo-American engineered Cold War was entirely due to the desire of the Soviet Union to achieve global superiority by aggressively spreading communism throughout the globe, something that Joseph Stalin never actually practiced or agreed with. Unfortunately, once the logic of the Cold war set in, Soviet leaders increasingly played the role of America’s mortal enemy, a role that “Churchill and his friends” in the U.S. State Department seemed more than happy to assign to them. As both sides became more entrenched and aggressive, this misguided policy of confrontation succeeded in bringing the world to the edge of thermonuclear war on more than one occasion. Fortunately, the historic Stalin-Roosevelt collaboration should leave no doubt that

⁸³ Ulam, 437.

when the politics of brinkmanship and confrontation are set aside, such unsought perils can not only be avoided but more positive and perhaps unexpected results are possible.

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