

...the glaring and dangerous defect of nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from 1919 to 1939 — the almost total neglect of the factor of power.
— E. H. CARR, *The Twenty-Years Crisis*,
1939

The time had come to be realistic.
— FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, 1941¹

II

The Yalta Axioms: Roosevelt's Grand Design

ONE EVENING in March of 1943, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden dined privately at the White House with President Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins. The three fell into a long, ruminating conversation that continued late into the night. With an ease available only to men who number themselves among the handful of arbiters over the world's destiny, they surveyed the outstanding political questions of the entire planet, playing with borders, shifting governments like so many chess pieces, guessing at the political shadings that would color the postwar map. "A conjuror, skillfully juggling with balls of dynamite," was the way Eden remembered Roosevelt from that night. "The big question which rightly dominated Roosevelt's mind was whether it was possible to work with Russia now and after the war," he recalled.

Roosevelt asked Eden what he thought of the "Bullitt Thesis," referring to a lengthy memorandum, based upon the Riga axioms, that Bullitt had sent to the White House several weeks earlier. Bullitt, whose enthusiasms of ten years before had long since soured into fear and alarm, predicted that the Russians would succeed in communizing the Continent — unless the United States and Britain blocked "the flow of the Red amocba into Europe."

Eden replied that a definite answer to this question was impossible. But "even if these fears were to prove correct," he continued, "we should make the position no worse by trying to work with Rus-

sia and by assuming that Stalin meant what he said." Eden agreed with Roosevelt that it would be better to proceed on a premise contrary to Bullitt's — that it would be possible to find some system of working *with*, rather than *against*, the Soviet Union. Roosevelt also did not think that a categorical answer existed. He believed Soviet goals and methods would be partly determined by Stalin's own estimate of American and British intentions and capabilities.²

Certainly the most important goal of Roosevelt's wartime diplomacy was the establishment of a basis for postwar cooperation with the Soviet Union. He had a clear conception of the postwar settlement he wanted and how it might be achieved. This conception was also governed by a number of axioms, some of which had predated the war, some of which had emerged in the course of the war. Roosevelt's axioms were always more tentative than those of Riga, but at their center point, there also lay an image — derived from experience, assessment, and optimism — of Soviet Russia.

Secretary of War Henry Stimson once grumbled about Roosevelt's "confounded happy-go-luckiness."³ This habit of deferral, a tendency to charmingly wave away a problem, was an oft-remarked characteristic of the President. But he had not put off thinking about the postwar world, and early on he had taken as his first premise that this peace would have to be based upon the realities of power.

Shortly after the Eden visit, he had opened a public window on his thinking. A journalist named Forrest Davis had stayed a weekend in the White House, talking with the President about his ideas for the postwar world. The article, checked over in advance by the President, appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the spring of 1943. Word filtered through the State Department that the article was to be regarded as authoritative; it expressed the "Old Man's Grand Design."

This new peace had to be based upon "the factor of power," Davis wrote. The Versailles System had collapsed because of the failure to include power considerations in the post-World War I peace settlement. The League of Nations had been an idealistic dream, without proper foundations. "Aspirations toward a better world" were not Roosevelt's primary concern, but rather, "the cold, realistic techniques, or instruments, needed to make those aspirations work . . . The question was one of power among the victors. How would they use their power?"

Davis made clear Roosevelt's assumption that the United States

would participate in the peace. The Soviet Union would also have to be brought in. "With Germany reduced and France in ruins," Davis wrote, "Russia becomes the only first-rate military power on the continent."⁴

Such an approach separated Roosevelt from most American planning for the postwar world, both in and outside government. When he continued to speak of Woodrow Wilson as "my President," he had more in mind than merely his service during World War I as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. For he remained committed to the Wilsonian goals of (as he expressed it) a "better world, an ordered world."

But, as he remarked once, not long after first becoming President, he had also learned Woodrow Wilson's mistakes. He searched for more "realistic" methods with which to solve the major postwar problems of Germany and Japan; of preserving peace, countering aggression, and preventing instability; of maintaining the victors' alliance and calmly settling the inevitable disputes among them. To complicate matters, the machinery had to be agreeable to the American people, for without an adequate popular consensus, the United States could not play the leading role Roosevelt envisioned for it. The thought of creating such machinery delighted him, for he gloried in the manipulation of power. This renegade Wilsonian, for that is what he was — mindful of the lessons of the preceding quarter century, a much more subtle and pragmatic politician than the preceding war President, more sensitive to the nuances of personality and of international relations — planned to use spheres of influence and other more traditional tactics from the "old diplomacy" in order to create a new system.⁵

For that centerpiece of the Wilsonian vision, the League of Nations, he had no patience. Though he had campaigned for the League in 1920, he had dismissed it by 1935 as "nothing more than a debating society and a poor one at that." At the Atlantic Conference in August 1941, he steadfastly refused even to include mention of a new international organization in the Atlantic Charter, despite British entreaties that this omission would be tragic. Such a reference, the President insisted, would only create suspicion and opposition in the United States. "The time had come to be realistic," he said. He might, he allowed, support some organization after a long transition period, but at best such an organization would only be a safety valve, of no political significance.⁶

For Roosevelt, the only sensible way to organize a new international order was on the basis of a consortium of the Great Powers, in which the United States would play an active role. Less than two months after Pearl Harbor, he was complaining that Churchill had not given much thought to the postwar world and to how "the German problem" was to be solved. The United States would have to take a hand "to the extent of joining in the police work for a time." After all, explained the President, "somebody had to be in a position if there were signs of Germany breaking loose again to crack down on them hard."⁷

Soon Roosevelt — with his gift of locating major problems in the idiom of a friendly village, for which, no doubt, he was the country squire — was talking about international "sheriffs" and the Four Policemen — the U.S., Britain, Russia, and China. In 1942 and 1943, he outlined to both Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov (who visited him under the pseudonym "Mr. Brown") and Anthony Eden his vision of the wartime alliance made permanent, in the form of the Four Policemen who "would maintain sufficient armed force to impose peace."

China brought a skeptical reaction from both foreign ministers. Eden thought China might well have to go through a revolution after the war, and he frankly "did not much like the idea of the Chinese running up and down the Pacific." China was one of Roosevelt's great illusions, rather surprising for one fixed upon the idea of power. But he feared that a weak China would give rise to a Spanish Civil War on a grand scale, and hoped that treating it as a Great Power would assist the country in solving its internal problems. He also thought that an Asian policeman was necessary to meet Asian nationalism and help control Japan, and that China could act as a barrier to Soviet influence.⁸

By the time of Eden's visit in the spring of 1943, however, public opinion was already forcing Roosevelt to disguise his Great Power consortium in a Wilsonian garb. He was a President very sensitive to the mood of the populace. During the 1930s, he had regarded the national temper of isolationism as a powerful constraint, preventing him from bringing American influence to bear on the developing conflicts in Europe and Asia. Public opinion hemmed him in. Just two months before Pearl Harbor, the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, reported to Churchill that the President had said "that his perpetual problem is to steer a course between the two factors repre-

sented by: (1) the wish of 70% of Americans to keep out of the war (2) the wish of 70% of Americans to do everything to break Hitler, even if it means war. He said that if he asked for a declaration of war he wouldn't get it, and opinion would swing against him. He therefore intended to go on doing whatever he best could to help us, and declarations of war were, he said, out of fashion . . . It pretty well confirms my view, which I think is yours, that he is going to move to the undeclared war rather than the other, although no doubt things could change overnight if the right things were to happen."⁹

Whereas Roosevelt had formerly believed an international organization was unacceptable to the American people, by 1943 he had come to see that failure to create some organization would be unacceptable. There was little choice; to oppose an organization would be like swimming against a powerful flood. It was not that he had regained the Wilsonian faith — but, rather, much of the country had.

By 1943, there had been a vast movement in public opinion that would have considerable effect on policy for the rest of the war and into the Cold War. The American people were in an internationalist phase, a fervent rebirth of Wilsonianism, moved in part, as one historian has written, by a “pervasive feeling of guilt” that the Second World War resulted to a significant degree from the United States’ failure to play its proper role after the First. The pollster George Gallup had already detected in the summer of 1942 “a profound change in viewpoint on international affairs” among the American people; by May of 1943, 74 percent endorsed United States participation in an international police force to keep the peace.

Congress mirrored this change. “God damn it, everybody’s running around here like a fellow with a tick in his navel, howling about postwar resolutions,” Tom Connally, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, exploded at one point. Eventually passing the Fulbright and Connally resolutions, both houses went overwhelmingly on record in favor of a postwar organization.¹⁰

The alteration in public thinking reflected not only guilt, but also a changed environment. Senator Robert Taft had laid out the key isolationist assumption in 1939: “My whole idea of foreign policy is based largely on the position that America can successfully defend itself against the rest of the world.” Pearl Harbor and the hostilities

that followed destroyed the credibility of that position. The mobilization of the entire nation in the cause of total war further shifted attitudes. The development of bipartisanship — general agreement and cooperation between Congress and the Executive and between the two parties — meant that foreign policy no longer was a divisive, domestic party issue. One of the most significant figures in this development was John Foster Dulles, who was the chief foreign policy adviser of the Republican presidential candidate Thomas Dewey in 1944, and who negotiated with Secretary Hull a bipartisan truce that lasted the duration of that year’s presidential campaign.¹¹

Even more significant was Arthur Vandenberg, the leading Senate Republican foreign policy spokesman, who managed — streaking trails of purple rhetoric behind him — to embody in himself at one and the same time the transformation of attitudes in public opinion, in the Republican Party, and in the U.S. Senate — and all of this with an appropriate lack of modesty. Once, urged on by her husband, Mrs. Robert Taft tried to “butter Van up” at a dinner party, but was forced to report that she found the task impossible — “he buttered himself so thoroughly that I really couldn’t find a single ungreased spot.” Before the war, sharing Taft’s assumption about American self-defense, he had been an isolationist. After Pearl Harbor, swayed by arguments about air power from his nephew Air Force General Hoyt Vandenberg, swayed also by his desire to move from opposition into policy formation, he had come to accept a major United States role in postwar international affairs. His January 1945 “confession” before the Senate of the errors of isolationism capped the development of a broad internationalist consensus in domestic politics.¹²

By that time, Roosevelt had long since realized that his Grand Design would have to be redrawn, at least superficially, to take into account this great change in American public opinion. Instead of fighting public opinion, he would harness it. He would use a new League of Nations, a United Nations, to assure public support for an active American role in the postwar world, and so legitimize that role and ensure against a return to isolationism. This entailed a duality in his policy that many at the time — and many since — have failed to see.

By the autumn of 1943, he visualized a United Nations composed both of an assembly open to all nations and a more restricted “execu-

tive committee," which would be dominated by the Great Powers. At the same time, the Four Policemen would perform their peace-keeping role completely outside the UNO framework.

American opinion continued to be defiantly suspicious of "big power politics." Meanwhile, Roosevelt concluded that an executive committee controlled by the Big Four and the Four Policemen could achieve much the same purpose. In February 1944, he approved a merging of the police department into the executive committee.¹³ This change satisfied public and congressional sentiment, but it was more cosmetic than real, for the new organization rested upon a two-tiered structure that assured Great Power primacy. In other words, the United Nations itself represented a yoking together of two separate approaches to the postwar order — a Wilsonian peace, reflected in what became the General Assembly; and a Great Power peace, embodied in what became the Security Council. The genuine tension between these two approaches remained concealed for most of the Second World War. After the war, the conflict became explicit, and a major source of the Cold War.

The slow birth of the United Nations did not shift Roosevelt's underlying assumptions. For him it was axiomatic that the peace had to be based upon the realities of power, which in turn meant that the peace had to be rooted in the Great Powers. The Allies "are about 95 percent together," Roosevelt told a press conference in March 1943. "I wish some people would put that in their pipes and smoke it."¹⁴

This was only a mildly hyperbolic assessment of Anglo-American relations. There were some sharp differences on such questions as the role of General Charles de Gaulle, China, the European colonial empires, and postwar economic arrangements. Nevertheless, the area of common understanding and agreement was broad. The two countries were joined together not only by their military coordination and common strategic concerns, not merely by the close and comfortable personal relations between Roosevelt and Churchill, but also by deep ties of language, economics, culture, political traditions, and social contacts. On their major political goals, the British stood close to their Atlantic ally. The evidence indicates that Roosevelt, if not all those around him, shared in turn the premise expressed by

Walter Lippmann in 1944: "I take the agreement with Britain not for granted perhaps, but as fundamental."¹⁵

What held true with Great Britain certainly did not hold true with the Soviet Union. The gap between the U.S. and the USSR — measured in outlook, experience, traditions, habits, and contacts — was very wide. The difference in the relation of the United States to its two partners in the Grand Alliance, though obvious, still bears illustrating. Stimson's diary is studded with his declarations about the primary need to maintain Anglo-American collaboration in the postwar world, matched with the equally fervent assents of senior American and British officials. Indeed, Stimson and many of the English almost seemed members of the same society.

The friendliness and mutual comprehension contrasted sharply with the distance evident in Stimson's account of his first meeting in 1943 with the new Soviet ambassador to Washington, Andrei Gromyko. "I got into a fairly nice human relation with him for a wonder — the first time I have with any of these Russians. I had my Russian map out . . . and then I asked him where he lived and he pointed out a place in the northwestern part of Russia now occupied by the Nazis. The tears came in his eyes when he told me that he hadn't heard from any of his relatives and he didn't know whether they were alive. I told him I hoped that the Russians would find their old capital, Kiev, not altogether battered to pieces but he said he did not have very much hope of it. He is a young man and seemed to be more like a human being than the others that the Soviets have had here."¹⁶

Of Russia, the Americans could never be sure. The establishment of diplomatic relations in Roosevelt's first term had proved of little value. Roosevelt's own attitudes during the 1930s had been mixed. He had had some curiosity about the Soviet Union, a measured respect for its accomplishments, and a certain sympathy for its goals of social justice, although he doubted that one could attain "Utopia in a day." Such regard did not diminish his abhorrence of the nature of communist rule and its atheism. In October 1933, commenting on an enthusiastic book about Soviet Russia, he complained that it failed to include "enough of the costs in hunger, death and bitterness in uprooted folks that had been paid for in the extraordinary achievements by the Soviet regime in the past fifteen years." He had not thought possible the importation of its revolution into the United States, and

Digitized by Google

he did recognize that as a state power it would become an increasingly important factor in world politics.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 and the subsequent Russian attack on Finland turned his feelings to scorn; he classed Russia with Germany as a totalitarian dictatorship. When extreme left-wing students heckled him at a White House conference in 1940, Roosevelt responded that "everyone who has the courage to face the facts" knows that the Soviet Union "is run by a dictatorship as absolute as any other dictatorship in the world." Yet he still kept open backdoor negotiations with the Russians, for he believed that the Nazi-Soviet Pact was inherently unstable, and, in its failure, might give way to an alliance between the Soviet Union and the West.¹⁷

The Germans abruptly abrogated the pact with their punishing attack on the Soviet Union in the night of June 21–22, 1941. "It will mean the liberation of Europe from Nazi domination," Roosevelt wrote shortly after, almost happily, to Admiral William Leahy. "And at the same time I do not think we need worry about any possibility of Russian domination."

Although the United States itself was still a half year short of being officially at war, the President, like Churchill, saw instantly that Russia now shared a common enemy with Britain and the United States. Necessity had made the Soviet Union a natural ally of the West, and in such an alliance resided the best hope for victory.¹⁸

The foundations for what afterward became known as the Grand Alliance were laid by Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's alter ego in wartime diplomacy, a month after the German invasion.

"An odd creature but a very nice one," Lord Halifax had once mused about Hopkins. Certainly he was the most unlikely of diplomats. Informal, wisecracking, cynical, uninterested in bureaucratic procedures, with an unquenchable passion for café society and race-tracks, Hopkins, the son of an Iowa harness salesman, had first come to the attention of the Roosevelts while doing social work in the slums of New York City. He became a top relief administrator in the New Deal, and then Secretary of Commerce. Roosevelt may well have looked favorably on him as a possible successor, but Hopkins lost any presidential ambitions and a good deal of his stamina as the result of an operation for stomach cancer in 1937. Thereafter, he appeared, as Jonathan Daniels put it, like "Death on the way to a frolic." And, thereafter, he existed for only one purpose — to serve

Franklin Roosevelt. In May 1940, he moved into the White House, where he stayed for the next five years. He instinctively understood Roosevelt's moods and desires, and also knew how to shape both. His loyalty to FDR was unquestioned; and he acted as the President's agent, problem-solver, war-expediter, and troubleshooter, both in Washington's bureaucracies and in high diplomacy.

At the end of July 1941, wearing a homburg borrowed from Winston Churchill, he boarded a seaplane in Scotland, flew to Archangel, there changed planes and flew on to Moscow, where he presented Stalin with an introduction from Roosevelt: "I ask you to treat him with the identical confidence you would feel if you were talking directly to me."¹⁹

Hopkins, like the other wartime leaders coming from the West, was fascinated by the thought of meeting the isolated ruler of the Kremlin. They found not the Bolshevik Revolutionary nor the Bloody Tyrant, but rather a short, stocky, willful Georgian — with his stiff hair brushed back, he struck the permanent undersecretary of the British Foreign Office as looking like a porcupine — who, doodling wolves while he talked, would laconically and flatly get right to the point. Obsessive about security and secrecy, unconcerned about human life, he sought to master every threat in the most thorough way he could. The task was never-ending, for, as his daughter has written, "He saw enemies everywhere." In his last interview with a foreigner before his death, Stalin told a little parable about how to deal with enemies: the Russian peasant who sees a wolf knows what the wolf intends to do, and the peasant does not try to tame the wolf, nor does he delay, but rather kills the animal as quickly as he can. So Stalin had dealt with the Soviet peoples. "He has shut himself up within the innermost spheres of hell," Victor Serge wrote of him. "Though intrepid, he lives in fear. Crafty, he lives on suspicion. Today, he ordains assassination, tomorrow apotheosis."

It was Stalin's brutal and bloody rule — "the despotic regime of a dictatorship of industrial development" — that had pushed Russia at a forced pace into the industrial age. Yet Stalin himself knew less and less of what went on beyond the walls of the Kremlin and his holiday dachas. In the 1930s, in the midst of the nightmare of collectivization, he was shown faked motion pictures of the happy, contented life of peasants on collective farms. After the war, he would occasionally press money into his daughter's hand, although he had

himself no idea of what the money was worth or how much anything cost. The only monetary values he knew were the old prerevolutionary ones. He himself never spent money; he had no place to spend it and nothing to spend it on.

Yet the Westerners also saw Stalin's qualities as organizer, administrator and commander that had recommended him to Lenin and finally brought him to undisputed leadership. "Stalin's greatest talent," one historian has written, was as a "master-builder of bureaucratic structures, and this it was that determined his conceptions and his methods . . . He reacted, as was to be expected, by using the lever whose use he best understood; he resorted to force, with the appropriate controls." Attending to specifics, be they boundaries, coal production, or railway tracks, Stalin seemed to have little time for great conceptions or grand designs, his own or anybody else's. "A declaration I regard as algebra," he once said to Eden during the war. "I prefer practical arithmetic."

Notions of world revolution were to him algebra. He preferred the practical arithmetic of realism in international politics; he aimed, and so this was the thrust of Soviet foreign policy, to play the game of nations. From time to time, foreigners understood this. "The Soviet authorities are extremely realistic, and it is most difficult to persuade them with abstract arguments," reported the Japanese ambassador to Moscow, in the closing days of World War II. At almost exactly the same time, the American ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, made exactly the same point. "I am afraid Stalin does not and never will fully understand our interest in a free Poland as a matter of principle," he said. "He is a realist in his actions, and it is hard for him to appreciate our faith in abstract principles."

The Yugoslav partisans, who might have had reason to think otherwise, learned the same thing when they set up an Anti-Fascist Council at the end of 1943. The Boss — as Stalin was known to a small circle in Moscow — was furious. "He considers this," one of his deputies reported to the Yugoslavs, "a knife in the back of the Soviet Union and a blow to the Tehran decisions." Commenting on the bitter blasts from Moscow, Moša Pijade, a leading Yugoslavian communist, could only conclude in 1943, "Stalin's revolutionary days are over. He has become a statesman and is no longer sensitive to the needs of a revolution. He is worried about the boundaries of great states and agreements on spheres of influence." ²⁰

And what was Stalin's greatest achievement? That he presided over the industrialization that not merely modernized the Soviet Union, but transformed it into one of the world's superpowers? That he was the man of steel who led the Soviet Union through the Great Patriotic War, in which twenty million of its citizens perished? That he then built a new empire in an age when empires were supposed to fall, not rise? That as many died in the war he ceaselessly and brutally waged against his own people as in the Second World War? That, in one of the great hoaxes of the twentieth century, he so successfully duped what he called the "honest fools," both at home and abroad, into believing that Moscow was the font of tomorrow's better world, and he, the embodiment of the coming utopia? That, in the words of a Yugoslav, he "killed more good communists than the bourgeoisie of the whole world put together"? Or simply that, through it all, he survived, and ruled almost unchallenged for almost three decades, and then, in a dacha just outside Moscow, died a nonviolent death — though it was violent to see, for during a period of several days he slowly suffocated as a consequence of a stroke?

That was in 1953. Twelve years earlier, in June of 1941, in the first days of the German invasion, Stalin had suffered a nervous collapse. But he had recovered and reassumed control by the time of Hopkins' arrival, and he succeeded in presenting himself as a rough but beleaguered and courageous potential ally. Even as the German blitzkrieg was furiously pushing into Russia, Stalin talked with Hopkins far more directly, intimately, and honestly than he had ever before conversed with a Western politician. In a masterly but matter-of-fact way, he described Russia's dire problems and listed the weapons and materials needed. (Masterly though the presentation was, there is reason to think now that Stalin requested weapons and materials inappropriate to Russia's immediate problems.) Stalin, in these conversations, clearly regarded Hopkins as an extension of Roosevelt, as indeed by this time he was.

Hopkins left Moscow on August 1. His trip had set in motion not only lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union but the Grand Alliance itself. Stalin had impressed Hopkins, though in a tentative way. "The caviar and smoked salmon were almost too much!" Hopkins wrote a week after he left Moscow. "I would hardly call Uncle Joe a pleas-

ant man, although he was interesting enough, and I think I got what I wanted, but you can never be sure about that."

Hopkins also came away convinced that the alliance could only be conducted through contact at the highest levels, outside the normal bureaucratic channels, certainly not through Laurence Steinhardt, then the American ambassador to Moscow. "It seemed to me after my conference in Russia with Stalin that the President should personally deal with Stalin," he noted in October 1941. "It was perfectly clear that Stalin had no confidence in our Ambassador or in any of our officials in Moscow. I gathered he would have felt the same way about the State Department if he had been asked."²¹ The experience with other personal emissaries like Averell Harriman and Joseph Davies bore out this contention, although Roosevelt himself did not meet Stalin until the two gathered with Churchill at the Tehran Conference in late November and early December 1943.

The main questions to be decided at Tehran were military. Stalin, bitter toward the British and suspicious of them, insisted that his allies open a Second Front against the Germans in Western Europe. Roosevelt and Churchill promised that an invasion would take place in the late spring of 1944. The Russians for their part pledged a coordinated offensive in the East.

The three leaders agreed in a general way to dismember Germany after the war. They also concurred that there would be some undefined shifts in the borders between Russia and Poland (to the advantage of Russia) and between Poland and Germany (to the advantage of Poland). Roosevelt and Stalin discussed shearing France of its colonies in Indochina.

Roosevelt raised with Stalin the American plans for the United Nations. Stalin indicated considerable doubts about such an organization. Leaving no question about his own views, FDR reassured Stalin that he had not forgotten the fruitless debates in the League of Nations. The center of his design continued to be a Great Power consortium.

Stalin indicated during the conference that the "communization" of Europe was hardly his first concern. Replying to Churchill's confession that he had done everything in his power after World War I to contain Bolshevism, Stalin ironically said that the Russians had discovered "it was not so easy to set up Communist regimes."

Still, he left many questions unanswered. At one dinner, Churchill asked about the Soviet Union's postwar territorial goals.

"There is no need to speak at the present time about any Soviet desires," Stalin replied. "But when the time comes, we will speak."²²

"I think that as a roving Ambassador for the first time I did not 'pull any boners,'" Roosevelt wrote to Sumner Welles after the conference. Tehran also provided Roosevelt with some confirmation of the soundness of his design for the postwar order.²³

As already noted, Roosevelt believed the peace had to be based upon the realities of power, which meant that it would have to be grounded in a Great Power consortium. The British easily fit into this design. The key question concerned the role of the Soviet Union. Here Roosevelt operated on a series of axioms very different from those of the Soviet specialists in the State Department.

He believed that Russia could no longer be considered an outsider, beyond the pale of morality and international politics. What that meant in the context of the war was already obvious. The President recognized that the major land war in Europe was taking place on the Eastern Front; it was there that Germany could be defeated, with a consequent reduction in American casualties. A kind of comparative advantage set in. The Russians specialized in men, dead and wounded, while the United States pushed its industrial machine to new limits. A year after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Roosevelt declared that "Russian endurance" was "still the main strength."

The war, which promised to bequeath a great power vacuum in Europe and at the same time erased all doubts about Russia's power and capabilities, made inevitable the emergence of the Soviet Union as a paramount and indispensable factor in the postwar international system, especially in Europe. Thus, the alternative to a broad understanding would be a postwar world of hostile coalitions, an arms race — and another war.²⁴

Some such understanding was possible because the breach that had opened at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution had narrowed and could narrow further. Roosevelt thought of the Soviet Union — less as a revolutionary vanguard than as a conventional imperialist power, with ambitions rather like those of the Czarist regime. In other words, Roosevelt emphasized the imperatives of statehood in Soviet policy, rather than the role of ideology. In contrast to the Riga

axioms, he proceeded on the proposition that a totalitarian domestic system did *not* inevitably and necessarily give rise to a totalitarian foreign policy. As important, he assumed less coherence and purposefulness in the Kremlin's behavior in international politics than did those who operated on the Riga axioms. Since the Soviet Union was not so much a world revolutionary state, Roosevelt believed the Grand Alliance could be continued after the war in the form of "business-like relations." He also knew that the Soviet Union would be preoccupied after the war with its vast task of reconstruction, and would be desperately interested in stability, order, and peace.²⁵

Successful collaboration among the Great Powers would necessitate the allaying of many years of Soviet hostility and suspicion. Roosevelt regarded the dissipation of distrust as one of his most important challenges. The United States could prove its good faith by sticking to its agreements. Even if the West could not deliver immediately on its promised Second Front, at least it could provide the aid it had pledged — and, in that way, also do itself a considerable favor. Again and again, Roosevelt ordered that the production and delivery of lend-lease goods be speeded up, that the quantities be increased. It was a battle down the line. "Frankly," the President sharply reminded a subordinate, "if I were a Russian, I would feel that I had been given the run-around in the United States."²⁶

High-level personal contact was the most important method by which suspicion could be dispelled and some precedent established for postwar concert. This provided a major reason for the wartime summit meetings. As time went along, Roosevelt became increasingly confident of success.

The apparent progress in this task gave rise to another axiom — one could do business with Stalin. After Hopkins' trip to Moscow in July 1941, Stalin was increasingly seen in a fresh light — as a realistic, rational statesman. Tehran certainly gave strong support to this new image.

All of this put even more emphasis on high-level contacts. "I know you will not mind my being brutally frank when I tell you that I think I can personally handle Stalin better than either your Foreign Office or my State Department," Roosevelt had already written Churchill in March 1942. "Stalin hates the guts of all your top people. He thinks he likes me better, and I hope he will continue to do so."

This reliance on informal, personal channels fit in well with Roosevelt's own preferences, his confidence, perhaps even his overconfidence. Indeed, in 1943, Stimson tartly summed up the "Rooseveltian view" of "good administrative procedures" — "He wants to do it all himself."²⁷ Roosevelt always depended upon an immeasurable quality, his famous charm, to achieve measurable results, to move and hold people in order to attain his goals in both domestic and international politics. That charm, in turn, was a product of considerable self-confidence and a buoyant, though neither naïve nor untested, optimism.

There were two other important reasons for taking this tack. Roosevelt considered Secretary of State Cordell Hull "much in the stratosphere," and lacked confidence in the State Department bureaucracy. Thus, the State Department was excluded from most of the significant wartime diplomacy, and its officials passed the time either in making voluminous plans for a postwar Wilsonian world, or sulking in their tents. Those historians who confuse the State Department's concerns with those of FDR on such questions as the United Nations or economic planning can be seriously misled.²⁸

Decisions on the Soviet side were obviously made only at the most senior levels. Those not at the top — that is, in some sense, everyone save Stalin — were held in check, fearing to depart from their instructions. Important business could only be done with the dictator.

One of Roosevelt's fundamental assumptions was that it was vitally important that the United States have a realistic estimate of Soviet power and the sphere of influence it was carving out, and that it pay close heed to Stalin's "security objectives." Spheres of influence were not a take-it-or-leave-it matter, but rather a basic datum of international relations.

But his very awareness of these needs created difficulties for Roosevelt. He had to speak in two languages. With the Russians, he talked of a Great Power consortium, based on the realities of international politics. At home, he continued to try to obscure this basic program in the idealistic Wilsonian language, which by then had become the lingua franca of postwar thinking. Lord Halifax pointed out the crux of the difficulty in Anglo-American relations with the Russians when he noted in 1942 "how important a place all those ideas of security are going to hold in Stalin's mind, and how much

they are likely to influence his judgment in regard to cooperation with ourselves." Halifax hoped it would be possible to find a solution "to take account of both our moral obligations and the forces of *realpolitik*, which are going to be deciding forces in Europe for many years to come, with those eighty millions of sulky Germans in the middle of it."²⁹

A resolution of the still-implicit tension between these two methods for organizing the peace — *realpolitik* and Wilsonianism — would demand all the improvisational talents of Franklin Roosevelt, the artful dodger.

Meanwhile, Roosevelt tried to finesse the problem with literal double-talk. Early on, he had realized that Soviet borders would include an eastern chunk of Poland, Bessarabia, the Baltic states, and some of Finland. He knew too that Russian influence would reach farther into Europe. Under such circumstances, it would be futile to oppose Stalin's immediate goals since he had the power to obtain them anyway, and better to try to temper the character of Soviet influence in the context of a larger understanding.

In January 1945, meeting with a group of senators, Roosevelt seemed to suggest that spheres of influence, the villain in Wilsonian ideology, had been granted a hearing at Tehran and then banished. What he said next, however, was just the opposite. "The occupying forces had the power in the areas where their arms were present and each knew that the others could not force things to an issue." The President added the obvious: "The Russians had the power in Eastern Europe." It was clearly impossible to have a break with them. "*The only practicable course was to use what influence we had to ameliorate the situation.*" Roosevelt made the same kind of point when the question of a Great Power veto in the international organization came up. "Unanimity was as a practical matter inevitable and might as well be conceded in a formal matter." The world had to be faced as it was; Russia would define its own security interests around its rim. On some issues, it would be not merely futile but actually dangerous to try to force the Russians to bend to an American will.³⁰

Churchill, acting on many of the same premises, made his own effort to find a practical solution when he journeyed to Moscow in October 1944 — this, the occasion of the famous percentage deal for the divi-

sion of the Continent, with the Russians given hegemony in Eastern Europe. This approach certainly seems paradoxical, if not cynical, in the light of Churchill's bitter denunciation of exactly such a division in his Iron Curtain speech a year and a half later.

But Churchill was conflicted in his own mind, a problem obvious to his contemporaries. "I can't help being rather impressed by Winston's sharp change of front on Russia," Halifax noted in 1942, for having called Eden "every name from a dog to a pig for suggesting composition with Stalin, he now goes all out for it himself in a message to the President." Two weeks after the 1944 Moscow meeting, Churchill's doctor observed that the Prime Minister "seems torn between the two lines of action . . . At one moment he will plead with the President for a common front against Communism and the next he will make a bid for Stalin's friendship. Sometimes the two policies alternate with bewildering rapidity."³¹

It was "composition" that Churchill sought in Moscow, to put algebra aside and work out the arithmetic — mutually acceptable rules that would accord with the interests and powers of the major victor states. An explicit spheres-of-influence settlement would reduce the ambiguities that could give rise to conflicts among the members of the Grand Alliance. Indeed, the very recognition of spheres might reduce their ultimate exclusiveness, for neither side would feel the need to tighten its defensive grip in order to fend off a feared drive against its sphere from the other.

Churchill vividly described the scene in his memoirs. The first meeting with Stalin began in the Kremlin at ten in the evening of October 9. "The moment was apt for business." Churchill took a half sheet of paper and wrote out the percentages that were to reflect degrees of "predominance": Rumania, 90 percent for the Russians; Greece, 90 percent for the British (in cooperation with the United States); Bulgaria, 75 percent for the Russians; Hungary and Yugoslavia, 50-50.

He pushed the paper across to Stalin. The dictator paused, then made a large tick with a blue pencil and passed it back.

"Let us burn the paper," Churchill said.

"No, you keep it," replied Stalin.

No doubt embarrassed by the apparent cynicism of the moment and the difficulties that followed in the postwar years, Churchill attempted in his memoirs to play down the significance of the agree-

ment. The division applied, he wrote, only to "immediate war-time arrangements . . . All larger questions were reserved on both sides for what we then hoped would be a peace table when the war was won." But the many historians who have uncritically accepted Churchill's after-the-fact rationale have been led astray.

The actual minutes of the conversation demonstrate that Churchill knew exactly what he was doing, that he was seeking a permanent understanding: "The time would come when they would meet at the armistice table, which might also be the place where the peace was settled," he said. "The Americans would find it easier to settle at an armistice table, because there the President could decide, whereas at a peace table the Senate would have to be consulted." In other words, such "temporary" settlements were meant to become *faits accomplis*.

Stalin "understood" Churchill. "It was a serious matter for Britain," said the Soviet dictator, "when the Mediterranean was not in her hands." Just as Russia was ceded "first say" in Rumania, so, Stalin agreed, Britain would have "first say" in Greece. Churchill won a further concession from Stalin regarding Italy. While claiming that it would be easier to "influence" the head of the Italian Communist Party were he in Moscow, Stalin nevertheless acceded to Churchill's wish that the Soviet Union "soft-pedal the Communists in Italy and not . . . stir them up."

Churchill did not hide what was on his mind. "The Prime Minister said it was better to express these things in diplomatic terms and not to use the phrase 'dividing into spheres' because the Americans might be shocked. But as long as he and Marshal Stalin understood each other, he could explain matters to the President."³²

The Russians left no question that they preferred such practical arithmetic to the algebra of declarations. "At Moscow, we were given an even warmer welcome than we got when I went with Eden last year, and the visit was, on the whole, a great success," wrote General Hastings Ismay, Churchill's chief of staff. Stalin came to dinner at the British embassy ("having never previously had a meal at any foreign embassy"), attended the Bolshoi Ballet with the Prime Minister, and even went to the airport in a pouring rain to see the British delegation off. "I am no nearer understanding the Russian mentality than I was at the beginning of the war," added Ismay, "but I believe unless we and the Americans acquire and retain their friendship, there is little hope for the peace of the world."³³

Churchill had assured Stalin that he could explain matters to Roosevelt, but considerable explication seemed called for. Both the good feeling and Churchill's position while in Moscow had been somewhat undermined by messages from Roosevelt. The President informed Stalin that the Moscow conversations could only be regarded as preliminary, pending another Big Three meeting. He included a fundamental statement of the new global vision that would shape American policy in the postwar era, a vision that seemed to reject spheres: "There is in this global war literally no question, either military or political, in which the United States is not interested. You will naturally understand this."

Roosevelt's disclaimer resulted from the intervention of Hopkins and Charles Bohlen. The latter had predicted two possible results of these bilateral conversations: "a first class British-Soviet row over European problems or . . . the division of Europe into spheres of influence on a power politics basis." Either, he warned, "would be disastrous."

It was not, however, that Roosevelt himself had suddenly embraced again the Wilsonian faith; his motivations were different. He had come to regard Britain as a junior member of the Grand Alliance, did not wish any of his own options foreclosed, and did not want (as Hopkins told Halifax) to "find himself pushed somewhat into a back seat." Moreover, especially in the weeks immediately before the 1944 presidential election, he had to be most careful to prevent the disclosure of any embarrassing "secret treaties" involving the domestically explosive Eastern European questions. (Of course, this percentage deal was not a treaty, rather an understanding, a *modus vivendi*.) Churchill was certainly right in his fear that "spheres of influence" would have shocked American public opinion. At the beginning of 1945, Halifax wrote to Churchill: "The trouble with these people is that they are so much the victims of labels: 'Power Politics, Spheres of Influence, Balance of Power, etc.' As if there was ever such a sphere of influence agreement as the Monroe Doctrine! And, as I can only tell them when they talk about being outsmarted . . . they evidently outsmarted somebody when they made the Louisiana Purchase!"³⁴

"Roosevelt weather" was the term applied by FDR's political staff to the favorable weather that seemed to signal victory on each of those

four November days that he had been elected President. The Russians adopted the same phrase to describe the unseasonably mild climate in the first two weeks of February 1945 over the Crimea, which juts down into the Black Sea from the underside of the Ukraine. At the seaside resort of Yalta, on the southern coast of the Crimea, the last Czar had maintained his summer palace. There the Big Three gathered for their final wartime conference, between February 4 and 11, under bright, clear skies that seemed a harbinger of victory, not only in the war but also over the unfamiliar terrain of postwar international politics. FDR brought his practicality to bear, in an effort to make firm the foundations of his Grand Design. The pleasant days and nights matched the climate of the conference itself — auguring victory for Roosevelt's foreign policy.³⁵

Marking the high tide of Allied unity, the Yalta Conference was a point of separation, a time of endings and beginnings. The conclusion of the war was at last in sight; the remaining days of the Third Reich were clearly numbered. Stalin, to the relief of the Joint Chiefs, gave further assurances that Russia would enter the war against Japan some three months after fighting ended in Europe, in exchange for certain territorial concessions in the Far East.

Aside from that central question, the major issues at Yalta concerned the politics of a postwar world. The decisions waited upon the energies of three tired men. "I think Uncle Joe much the most impressive," Alexander Cadogan, permanent undersecretary of the British Foreign Office, wrote to his wife. "The President flapped about and the P.M. boomed, but Joe just sat taking it all in and being rather amused. When he did chip in, he never used a superfluous word, and spoke very much to the point."³⁶

By and large, the Russians made more concessions than the West, and when they presented their own proposals, they were, in fact, sometimes simply returning proposals delivered to them at earlier dates by the Western powers.

The Russians, remembering their difficulties in the League of Nations, which culminated in their expulsion, were worried that they would find themselves isolated in a new international organization controlled by the United States and the United Kingdom through their allies, clients, dominions, and "Good Neighbors." The Russians accepted an American compromise, whereby the Great Powers retained a veto in the Security Council, and the Western leaders agreed to support the admission of two or three constituent Soviet

republics. The British won assent to a modified Great Power role for France, including both a zone of occupation in Germany and participation on the German Control Commission.³⁷

Roosevelt successfully pushed for a "Declaration on Liberated Europe," an ill-defined lever for Western intervention in Eastern Europe, but which mainly interested Roosevelt as a device to satisfy public opinion at home. He took it up only after he had turned down a more binding State Department proposal for a High Commission on Liberated Areas because "he preferred a more flexible arrangement."³⁸ Accord also followed on a number of less pressing points.

Two issues proved more difficult: the central question of Germany and the endless Polish imbroglio. Poland, the emblem of the early Cold War, took up more time than any other issue at the conference. The Allies did agree that the Russian-Polish border should be moved westward, to the Curzon Line, and, though not in very precise terms, further consented to compensation for Poland in the form of what had been German territory on its west.

More difficult was the nature of Poland's new government, that is, whether to install the Western-supported London exile government, bitterly anti-Soviet, or the Lublin government, little more than a Soviet puppet.

Britain went to war so "that Poland should be free and sovereign," said Churchill. Britain's only interest, he assured the other leaders, was "one of honor because we drew the sword for Poland against Hitler's brutal attack." Of course, he added, Polish independence could not be a cover for "hostile designs" against the Soviet Union.

Stalin, however, was still interested in practical arithmetic. "For Russia it is not only a question of honor but of security." As to honor — "We shall have to eliminate many things from the books." As to security — "Not only because we are on Poland's frontier but also because throughout history Poland has always been a corridor for attack on Russia." Twice in the last thirty years "our German enemy has passed through this corridor."

Churchill replied that he himself had little fondness for the London Poles, which was one element in the general weakness of the Western position on the Polish question. "Admittedly," a British diplomat commented, "Uncle Joe's masterly exposition of the Russian attitude over Poland sounded sincere, and as always was hyper-realistic."

At last, the Allies agreed to “reorganize” the Lublin government with some men from London and from the Polish underground, but details were left to Molotov and the two Allied ambassadors in Moscow to work out.³⁹

For Germany, the Russians pushed for dismemberment; in substance, their proposal was the suggestion Roosevelt had made at Tehran. The two Western governments went along, reluctantly.

The Russians also insisted on receiving reparations from Germany. Postwar planning in the U.S. had generally rejected reparations. America certainly had no need for reparations; and reparations had been in bad repute in both Britain and the United States since J. M. Keynes’ *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published shortly after the First World War. “We are against reparations,” Roosevelt had bluntly said before Yalta.

At Yalta, however, the Western countries met a Soviet Union urgently determined to exact reparations. As early as September 1941, in conversations with Averell Harriman and Lord Beaverbrook, Stalin had asked flatly: “What about getting the Germans to pay for the damage?” Stalin’s “second revolution” had been an industrial revolution, an upheaval that had cost much in human life and in the manner in which the survivors lived. Stalin’s interest in reparations was compensatory as well as punitive; he wanted help in the huge task of reconstruction that lay ahead. By 1945, the Germans had wrought enormous destruction. Twenty million people had been killed — though it was years before the Kremlin revealed the full magnitude. Seven million horses had been lost, as were 20 out of 23 million pigs. Destroyed were 4.7 million houses, 1710 towns, and 70,000 villages. Twenty-five million people were homeless. Sixty-five thousand kilometers of railway tracks had been ruined; 15,800 locomotives and 428,000 freight cars had been either demolished or damaged.

Here, however, the Soviet concern went beyond the simple arithmetic of devastation. Reading through the minutes of meeting upon meeting during the war and after, the historian must conclude that reparations were not only a central issue, but also a highly significant symbol in Moscow’s postwar vision — although always only of peripheral interest to the Americans. Perhaps the Russians could never understand the nature of American concern for Eastern Europe; similarly, the Americans could never comprehend the emotional inten-

sity the Russians attached to reparations. Reparations may well have been as much a “test case” for the Russians as Eastern Europe was to become for the Americans.⁴⁰

At Yalta, Churchill adamantly opposed reparations, warning that England “would be chained to a dead body of Germany.” Concerned about economic consequences and criticism at home, Roosevelt wavered until Hopkins shoved him a note: “The Russians have given in so much at this conference that I don’t think we should let them down.” The President finally agreed to set \$20 billion, half for the Russians, as the basis for further discussions, though with the understanding that reparations were to be in goods, production, and equipment, and not in cash. The British declined to commit themselves to a figure. Their attitude was summed up by one of their delegates, who declared that the Russian figures were “fantastic arithmetic and quite outside the bonds of possibility.”

Although Western policymakers later denied that the \$20 billion represented a fundamental point of agreement and subsequently downplayed its importance, this was not the case. “The Russians had a very carefully worked out program,” Secretary of State Edward Stettinius told Stimson and Navy Secretary James Forrestal in mid-March 1945. “The President backed up this program as a relatively moderate one, and one that would not create economic disruption in Europe.”⁴¹

The overall British attitude was suggested by a letter from Cadogan on the last day: “I have never known the Russians so easy and accommodating. In particular Joe has been extremely good. He is a great man, and shows up impressively against the background of the other two aging statesmen.” Churchill had been frustrated and despondent during the conference, in part because of his sense of Britain’s declining power. Yet he too toward the end of the meeting told his doctor that he had been impressed by Stalin’s humor, understanding, and moderation. He recovered more verve upon his return to London. “As long as Stalin lasted, Anglo-Russian friendship could be maintained,” he told some Cabinet members. “Poor Neville Chamberlain believed he could trust Hitler. He was wrong. But I don’t think I’m wrong about Stalin.”⁴²

Roosevelt was a realist; he knew that everything depended upon implementation of the accords, and that, in turn, would depend upon intentions and future alignments. He was gambling. He hinted at

this caution in a note he scribbled to his wife the day he left Yalta: "We have wound up the conference — successfully I think."⁴³

That said, there can be no question but that Roosevelt departed the Crimea optimistic and satisfied. Basing his conclusions on conversations with Roosevelt, Admiral Leahy decided that Roosevelt had "no regrets about what the Russians were to get. He thought they were valid claims." But FDR's satisfaction extended beyond the agreements themselves. He regarded the conference as a hopeful answer to the question about postwar cooperation with Russia that he had posed to Eden two years earlier, in the course of their after-dinner survey. This summit meeting in the Crimea had been a testing and, more important, a confirmation of what we might thus call Franklin Roosevelt's "Yalta axioms."

Stalin himself had gone out of his way to endorse the premise that underlay FDR's Grand Design. The dictator had pointed to "a more serious question" than an international organization. One should not worry too much about small nations. "The greatest danger was conflict between the three Great Powers." The main task was to prevent their quarreling and "secure their unity for the future."⁴⁴

It is true that Roosevelt, once home, delivered a speech to Congress, pure in its Wilsonianism, in which he declared that Yalta spelled the end of unilateral action, exclusive alliances, spheres of influence, power blocs, and "all other expedients that had been tried for centuries — and have always failed."

But, out of public earshot, he continued to stress the realities of power and the basic structure of a Great Power consortium. Two days after his speech to Congress, talking privately about Germany, he said, "Obviously the Russians are going to do things their own way in the areas they occupy." But he hoped that a general framework of collaboration would prevent the Soviet sphere of influence from becoming a sphere of control.⁴⁵

His optimism was shared down the line, even by some in the State Department, as well as among prominent foreign policy spokesmen outside the government. "The general atmosphere of the Conference was extremely good and it was clear throughout that the Russians genuinely wished to reach an agreement," reported H. Freeman Matthews, deputy director of the Office of European Affairs. John Foster Dulles had earlier criticized the Atlantic Charter for being "too much a static, rather than a dynamic concept of the

world." But now he was quick to praise. Yalta opened "a new era . . . The United States abandoned a form of aloofness which it has been practicing for many years and the Soviet Union permitted joint action on matters that it had the power to settle for itself." And James Byrnes, director of the Office of War Mobilization, flying home early from Yalta, passed the word to newsmen that Stalin had been lavish in praise of the United States and that "Joe was the life of the party."⁴⁶

Yet the Roosevelt weather did not long survive the conference. The Moscow discussions about Poland became deadlocked over the question of whether a reorganization of the Lublin government meant that it would be the basis of the postwar government, or whether an entirely new coalition government was to be created. There were also difficulties involving the Balkans. The Russians insisted that they should have the same kind of "first say" there as the Western powers had claimed in Italy — and were forcefully asserting that say, especially in Rumania.⁴⁷

The most acrimonious exchange was over the so-called secret surrender negotiations concerning German troops in northern Italy, which were conducted in Switzerland, principally in Berne, by Allen Dulles of the Office of Strategic Services and SS leader Karl Wolff. The West maintained that it was purely a local field matter, having nothing whatever to do with a separate peace in Western Europe. The Russians, alleging duplicity, charged that such an agreement would enable the Germans to transfer troops from Italy to the Eastern Front, the very thing that at Yalta the Russians had asked to have prevented. So intemperate did Stalin's accusations become that Roosevelt finally cabled him, "Frankly, I cannot avoid a feeling of bitter resentment toward your informers, whoever they are, for such vile misrepresentations of my actions or those of my trusted subordinates."⁴⁸

Yet nothing came of the talks with the SS leader, and the bitterness at the top of the alliance did not persist. To Harriman, who insisted that a major break was at hand, the President replied, "It is my desire to consider the Berne misunderstanding a minor incident." And in his last telegram to Churchill on April 11, 1945, he declared: "I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible

because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day and most of them straighten out as in the case of the Berne meeting. We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct." 49

The very fact that the Berne incident could be resolved gave Roosevelt new hope that his foreign policy would work in the postwar period. But the problems were getting ever more complicated. The postwar world was at hand, questions could not be deferred, the unifying factor of the common enemy would soon be gone.

There remained, moreover, the considerable gap between Roosevelt's *foreign* foreign policy and his *domestic* foreign policy. It would take enormous skill to be the realist and the idealist at the same time; and Roosevelt, the self-styled realist, certainly knew that. When it was suggested by an aide that he could appear at the upcoming planning meeting for the United Nations Organization in San Francisco and dispel problems with a "wave of the magic wand," he wearily replied that he doubted whether he still had such a wand to wave.

And there were other considerations. The Yalta axioms were very much the personal possession of Roosevelt and a few powerful independent agents, whose only loyalty was to him. Those axioms had no institutional base in the government; in a sense, their very emphasis on high-level personal contacts, outside of bureaucratic channels, precluded that. Certainly they were not popular in the State Department.

What the State Department thought, however, was not very significant so long as Roosevelt was there to set boundaries, not merely through his prerogative to approve or reject, but also by his presidential powers to promote or exile, to set questions, to give attention or inattention. In September 1944, Cadogan had remarked of Roosevelt in his diary, "A lot turns on his health." In the note FDR himself had scribbled to his wife on February 12, his last day at Yalta, the President had added, "I'm a bit exhausted, but really all right."

Two months later, on April 12, 1945, several hours after drafting that last cable to Churchill — "I would minimize the general Soviet problem" — Roosevelt complained of a terrific headache and collapsed. Later in the day he was dead.⁵⁰

In every authoritarian state, political life too readily becomes a struggle for access to the ruler and for the control of his sources for information.

— GEORGE KENNAN, September 1944¹

III

The World Bully

"WE SHALL NOT KNOW what he is really like until the pressure begins to be felt," General George C. Marshall said to Secretary of War Henry Stimson as the two rode back to the Pentagon after their first White House conference with the new President. Harry Truman was as shocked as anybody by the turn of fate. "I've really had a blow since this was dictated," he wrote on April 13 as a postscript to a letter he had begun a day earlier, while presiding over the Senate before the news of Roosevelt's death had reached him. "But I'll have to meet it."²

In those first days, the men who had served Roosevelt could do little more than speculate about the unknown Missourian who had succeeded the war leader.

"No one knows what the new President's views are — at least I don't," Stimson observed. "The threads of information were so multitudinous that only long previous familiarity could allow him to control them."

"The man has a lot of nervous energy, and seems to be inclined to make very quick decisions," noted Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. "But, after all, he is a politician, and what is going on in his head only time will tell."

Commerce Secretary Henry A. Wallace, walking through Truman's car on the Roosevelt funeral train, caught sight of the new President