

Managing the Transition from Ally to Adversary: Reflections on an Earlier Era of U.S.–Russian Relations

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Executive Summary

At the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union transformed from allies into adversaries and the Cold War began—a grim confrontation that lasted nearly half a century. After the Cold War, the U.S.–Russian relationship was by no means an alliance, but was relatively cooperative until the past few years. Under Russian president Vladimir Putin, a new chill has descended, and today there is talk that we are entering another Cold War.

This essay examines an earlier era in U.S.–Russian affairs, when presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman managed America’s relationship with the Soviet Union, which essentially meant dealing with the Soviet premier, Joseph Stalin. The contents of that relationship—how it evolved, how it disintegrated, and how American leaders—reacted is the subject of this essay.

Given the unsettled state of U.S.–Russian relations today and the many subplots that shape current policy, this paper makes no attempt to apply historical lessons to the management of contemporary problems; these are left for the reader to infer. Rather, we examine an earlier, though not necessarily simpler, era in which the U.S.–Russian relationship underwent dramatic change.

Introduction

Russia has been uneasy in its encounters with the West for a thousand years. The distinguished American scholar of Russian culture James H. Billington¹ observes that little has “disturbed Russians more [over the centuries] than the nature of their relationship to the West.”² Historically, Russia has swung between embracing and rejecting Western culture and values, feeling alternately superior to and humiliated by the power and progress of the West and opening and shutting the doors to engagement, alliance, and conflict.

Stephen Kotkin³ finds a cyclical nature in Russia’s encounters with the West: “Russian governments have generally oscillated between seeking closer ties with the West and recoiling in fury at perceived slights, with neither tendency able to prevail permanently.”⁴ Seldom is a clear-cut stance adopted; some blend of confrontation and cooperation has been the perpetual norm. Aside from purely geopolitical considerations, Russia has found reason to oppose the West on ideological grounds, whether before, during, and after the Communist era. Historically, Russians have nurtured a sense of special destiny and embraced ideologies flattering to the notion of Russian superiority in state and culture; this penchant remains true today.⁵

A Russian state vaunting its preeminence would not be a major challenge to American interests if Russia were merely a marginal player in global affairs. But Russia is a tremendous nation stretching from Atlantic to Pacific, an aggressive

¹ James H. Billington retired as Librarian of Congress after almost thirty years and taught history at Harvard and Princeton.

² James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 78.

³ Stephen Kotkin, a professor at Princeton and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, is working on a multi-volume reappraisal of Stalin. The first volume, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power (1878-1928)*, was published by Penguin Press in 2014. The second, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler (1929-1941)*, was published by Penguin Press in 2017. A third volume is in progress.

³ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 78.

⁴ Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2016), p. 4.

⁵For background on the role of ideology in contemporary Russian affairs, see Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013); Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); and Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, translated by Bela Shayevich (New York: Random House, 2016).

player in world affairs, and, critically, a state with formidable military prowess.⁶ FDR realized and worked with these capabilities during World War II; Harry Truman coped with them afterwards.

U.S.–Russian Relations Before the Second World War

It is an important but easily overlooked that while American and Russian interests have diverged frequently in the first hundred-and-thirty-seven years of the relationship, and while hard negotiations on vital issues may often have seemed endless, two important principles in U.S.–Russian negotiations emerged over time. First, deals in the interests of America could be struck, often on America’s terms, although the process was tortuous. And second, once deals were struck, Russia tended to honor its commitments. These rules of thumb can be seen in a review of the following encounters.

American Relations with Tsarist Russia

At the direction of the Continental Congress in 1781, Francis Dana led the first American mission to Russia, seeking support for America’s war of independence. Dana was unsuccessful in securing formal commitments, but by pursuing an existing interpretation of neutrality, Catherine the Great’s government tacitly supported the American cause.⁷ This was no act of idealism, but a cold calculation of how America might help Russia geopolitically.

⁶ Today’s Russian double-eagle flag (resurrected from the tsarist era) flies over the largest contiguous territory in the world—a country spanning eleven time zones and over 135 languages (about a fourth of which have some status in official business), peopled by 185 ethnic groups (though roughly eighty percent are ethnically Russian). Russia’s population of 145 million was in steep decline during the 1990s to mid 2000s, but has experienced an uncertain recovery since 2009. Although by world standards Russia has a weak economy, based largely on oil and natural gas, it is powerful militarily and America’s only peer competitor in nuclear weapons—a legacy of the Cold War.

⁷ In 1780, Catherine the Great initiated the League of Armed Neutrality to provide a counterweight to British power and to protect Russian commerce from the British wartime policy of unlimited search of neutral shipping for French contraband. Francis Dana was under instructions to seek Russian recognition of the rebellion and to gain American admittance into the League. Fred Kaplan writes: “Dana’s own mission went poorly. The French minister, under instructions from Paris, played a double game. He openly advocated that the Russian court accept Dana’s credentials. Behind the scenes he discouraged Russia from recognition of, let alone alliance with, the United States. Catherine also had game to play. She needed to maintain her alliance with France, keep Prussia at bay, and maintain a balance against British naval power, which was damaging neutral commerce. This was not a propitious time for the initiation of relations between Russia and America.” Fred Kaplan, *John Quincy Adams: American Visionary* (New York, NY: Harper, 2014), p. 49. Thus, the most Catherine could do was tacitly support the Americans.

After winning independence, America established formal diplomatic ties with Russia in 1807, and—except for a brief interregnum from 1917 to 1933—has maintained uninterrupted diplomatic relations, no matter how fraught the times.

Russia offered to help mediate an end to the War of 1812 on terms acceptable to the United States, but withdrew when Britain declined Russian involvement. Several decades later, Russia refused to join Britain and France in their efforts to impose a negotiated settlement favorable to the South in the American Civil War.

For its part, America adopted a policy of neutrality favoring Russia in the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856. Washington supplied Russia with naval ships and weapons during the Russo-Turkish War two decades later and was the first foreign power to recognize the new provisional Russian government when the last tsar, Nicholas II, abdicated in March 1917. When the United States entered World War I a month later on the side of the Entente powers, it became formally allied with Russia, albeit briefly, until the Bolshevik revolution in October ended the alliance.

Although America at the time of independence was geographically remote from Russia, their proximity changed as America expanded westward and Russia eastward.⁸ By 1812, Russia had established a southern trading base at Fort Ross, north of Spanish San Francisco, and soon threatened to appropriate vast stretches of Spanish land in the American far west. In 1821, the Russian imperial government proclaimed Russian sovereignty over much of the American Pacific Northwest. The edict sought to close the region to foreign ships (including American) and establish a Russian monopoly on hunting, fishing, and trade. This Russian demarche was among the catalysts that led President James Madison to announce the Monroe Doctrine in 1823—a doctrine drafted by his secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, America's most experienced diplomat in Russian affairs.⁹

⁸ The Treaty of Paris with Great Britain defined America's original borders on the eastern seaboard, quite remote from Russia. Over the next century, however, America pursued a policy of continental expansion through purchases of territory, coercive diplomacy, and sometimes force. Continental expansion brought its borders closer to Russia. As for Russian expansion, Russian adventurers had first ventured into the Siberian wastelands in the early 1600's, initially in pursuit of furs and then at the direction of the tsarist government as it extended its imperial reach. By 1639, Russian vanguards had reached the Pacific Ocean. Peter the Great adopted the title of Emperor of All Russia in 1721 and sponsored a number of expeditions to map the far reaches of the eastern empire and prepare the way for Russian colonization. By the early 18th century, the Russian empire extended into the New World.

⁹ A young John Quincy Adams accompanied his father to Paris, then went with Francis Dana from Paris to St. Petersburg in 1781 with his father's permission. He was fourteen years old, but spoke French fluently, which Dana did not, and thus could serve as interpreter at the Court of Catherine the Great, where French was the common language. John Quincy Adams became America's first minister to Russia

Three years of hard negotiations from 1821 to 1824 resulted in the withdrawal of the Russian edict, to be superseded by the U.S.–Russian Convention of 1824, ratified in 1825 as the first formal treaty¹⁰ of the thousands of formal and informal agreements, bilateral and multilateral, that the U.S. and Russia would enter. The parties concluded their first commercial treaty in 1832, formally blessing ad-hoc practices that had developed over years of increasing trade. In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, a proposition that had been discussed informally and sporadically since the 1850s, but delayed until after the Civil War.¹¹ This purchase obviated a potentially dangerous source of tension by moving the U.S.–Russian border to the waters of the arctic far north.

By the late 19th century, Russia was competing with European powers and Japan for influence in the Asian power vacuum left by the crumbling Chinese empire. This era coincided with America’s emergence as a Pacific and Atlantic power. Following the 1898 Spanish–American war, the United States maintained bases in the Philippines and Guam to serve its commercial interests in the Pacific Asia region.

In 1899, the United States announced an open-door policy towards China, asserting America’s right to commercial access on terms equal with those of other powers. Russia did not oppose this assertion. The Russian imperial government was facing a growing power in its far east: Japan, infused by the Meiji Restoration (1868) with a new vitality brought about in part by the American penetration of Asia in 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry sailed four warships into Tokyo Bay, ending two hundred years of Japanese isolation.

Japan’s growing power threatened Russia’s eastern frontiers, foreshadowing similar concerns in World War II, and came to a head in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905. Soundly defeated, Russia accepted the good offices of President Theodore Roosevelt to negotiate peace. The terms were viewed by the Japanese public as

(1809–1814) and secretary of state (1817–1825) before becoming president. He was the intellectual power behind the Monroe doctrine and is considered America’s greatest secretary of state by many. Adams is enjoying a resurrection today as a leading American strategic thinker; see, for instance, Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy for the Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/85739.htm>

¹¹ Tsarist Russia found itself in difficult financial circumstances following the Crimean War of 1853–1856 and feared that it might lose Alaska to Britain (which was anchored in British Columbia in the Pacific Northwest) if another war broke out. The tsar’s government began to discuss sale of Alaska to the United States in 1857. Negotiations eventually culminated in a treaty ratified by the Senate in March 1867. The United States purchased Alaska for \$7.2 million (about \$123 million today), or roughly two cents an acre.

gratuitously favorable to the Russians, who had been badly beaten (though reports of the settlement sparked anti-American riots in Tokyo,¹² Roosevelt won the Nobel peace prize for his efforts). When Nicholas II mounted the Russian throne in 1894, Grover Cleveland was president of the United States; Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman were older children; the United States was at the margins of world affairs; Joseph Stalin (né Joseph Jughashvili) was shy of his sixteenth birthday;¹³ and “Russia’s double-headed eagle nested across a greater expanse than that of any other state, before or since.”¹⁴

While relations before the Bolshevik revolution were based mainly on mutual advantage and noninterference,¹⁵ this informal footing would soon change.

World War I and the Postwar Years

In 1914, Europe ended a century of peace and stumbled into war. Imperial Russia joined the Entente powers fighting Prussia and the Austro–Hungarian empire. In early 1917, under mounting domestic backlash against a highly unpopular war, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, ending three hundred years of imperial tsarist rule.¹⁶ The United States became the first foreign power to recognize Russia’s new provisional government, fighting as an ally of Russia in World War I until the Bolsheviks seized power.

In the context of the conflict with Germany and its allies and a bloody civil war raging in Russia, America joined the British, French, and Japanese in landing troops at several northern Russian ports to prevent their falling into German hands. This

¹² Theodore Roosevelt’s daughter, Alice, was touring Asia with her new husband when the Treaty of Portsmouth was signed. She reported to her father that she had heard of riots in Tokyo by Japanese feeling they had been humiliated and cheated after one-and-a-half years of military victories, and that America was to blame. See Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), p. 417.

¹³ Stalin was born as Joseph Vissarionovich Djhugashvili in rural Georgia in the Russian empire in 1879. He adopted the revolutionary name “Koba” in 1899 when he joined the Social Democratic Worker’s Party, and the Bolshevik name “Stalin” in 1913.

¹⁴ Steven Kotkin, *Stalin, Vol. I, Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 6.

¹⁶ Tsarist institutions had their roots in the 14th century in the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which had inherited the culture and legitimacy of the Kievan Rus’. By the 16th century, Moscow had become the dominant city–state in Russia and in 1548, Ivan IV (the Terrible) adopted the title of Tsar of all the Russians. The Romanov dynasty was founded by Tsar Michael in 1613 after the so-called “time of troubles”— a period when rule in Russia was disputed. In 1721, Peter I (the Great) declared himself emperor of Russia, as well as tsar. From the beginning, tsars were autocratic rulers. The Romanov dynasty last until the Russian revolution in 1917.

move was not intended to overthrow the Bolshevik regime, as welcome as that outcome may have been. The practical effect, however, was to align Britain, France, America, and Japan with the White Russian forces (former tsarists and others) who were the Bolsheviks' enemy.

After three years of a brutal civil war that left Russia in ruins, the Bolsheviks, who had established what they called a 'disciplined war communism' in their ranks, prevailed, creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922.¹⁷ In the post- World War I years, Western opposition to Bolshevik rule stemmed largely from Moscow's espousal and active support of world revolution. By the 1920s, however, the Soviets had placed world revolution on the back burner, focusing instead on consolidating the position of the communist party in Russia and converting Russia into a modern, industrial power.

In Germany, meanwhile, an aging military hero, Paul von Hindenberg, presided over the government of the conservative Weimar Republic. The humiliating terms of the Versailles Treaty and onset of a worldwide economic crisis radicalized the Germans and paved the way for Adolf Hitler to ascend to the chancellery in January 1933. Once in office, Hitler quickly eliminated opposition and within a year, aided by Hindenberg's death in August 1934, secured absolute power for himself and the National Socialist party.

In the U.S., at roughly the same time, Franklin D. Roosevelt took the presidential oath of office in an America reeling from the Great Depression. FDR's early priorities were almost entirely domestic as he rolled out the fast-paced first hundred days of the New Deal; whatever foreign policies he pursued were largely in service to ending the American economic crisis. Roosevelt's recognition of the Soviet Union in November 1933, was but one element in a broad effort to stabilize conditions abroad in order to achieve economic recovery at home.

Perhaps influenced by George Kennan's negative assessment, many historians have characterized FDR as hopelessly naïve and idealistic, both in recognizing Russia in 1933 and, after June 1941, pursuing an alliance with Stalin.¹⁸ Recent scholarship tends to reject this view. FDR was an astute and wily statesman capable of pursuing multiple, often contradictory, policies at the same time and, while remaining constant to important goals, adjusting his tactics and strategy as necessary. He once

¹⁷ In December 1922, delegates from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR), the Transcaucasian SFSR, the Ukrainian SFSR, and the Russian SFSR signed a treaty creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This treaty was translated into a constitution in 1924. The USSR existed until its dissolution in 1991.

¹⁸ George Kennan wrote that Roosevelt's foreign policy was that of "a very superficial man, ignorant, dilettantish, severely limited in intellectual horizon." See Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

described himself a juggler—an apt characterization for a nimble politician.¹⁹ Roosevelt understood that past attempts to isolate if not destroy the Bolshevik had failed, and that global stability required that the U.S. and Russia maintain a working relationship and degree of cooperation, however difficult that might be. Roosevelt thus sought a meeting of the minds with Joseph Stalin.

The Wartime Grand Alliance

Many American figures figure prominently in the history of World War II, but none more so than FDR. Roosevelt used his skills as a master politician to lead the U.S. out of isolationism and into the Grand Alliance that defeated Germany and Japan. During his unequalled four terms in office, FDR created many features of the modern presidency and American security establishment, and with his vision of security in a postwar world, built a framework of institutions that remain at the heart of geopolitics today. Most critically, Roosevelt set the stage for the reintegration of the Allies' two great enemies, Germany and Japan, into the community of nations.

Roosevelt presided over the greatest military buildup in America's history, often personally setting the goals and pace of mobilization, and pursued the creation and delivery of nuclear weapons. These things were not decided in isolation, of course, but neither was FDR captive to adviser priorities and ideas; he was firmly in control, intellectually and administratively, and the creative roots of important policies and departures were often his.²⁰

In Roosevelt's estimation, a necessary condition for international stability was cooperation and compromise among the great powers on the great security issues—the kinds of problems that had yielded two world wars in 25 years. To advance this cooperation, Roosevelt began in 1939, only nine days after Churchill had joined Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty, by cultivating a close relationship with the future British wartime prime minister Winston Churchill. Although these leaders differed on many vital issues—for example, the future of colonialism—the U.S. and Britain became close allies in a relationship that outlived the war. FDR championed the Republic of China as an

¹⁹ Roosevelt, speaking to an audience in May 1942, called himself a juggler who never let his right hand know what his left hand was doing.

²⁰ Since FDR did not keep a diary or live to write his memoirs or record oral histories of his major policy decisions, we rely upon his correspondence, brief records from the archives, and the memories of associates for our understanding of his motives. These sources have been skillfully interpreted in works like Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman*; Eric Larrabee, *Commander-in-Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants, and Their War* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1987); Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1997; and David Stafford, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 2000).

emerging great power and attempted to bolster its chairman, Chiang Kai-shek. Although leery of France, Roosevelt did not oppose Britain's desire request for a seat at the great-power table for a future Free France and tolerated dealing with a man he detested, Charles de Gaulle. But what Roosevelt saw as his greatest challenge was establishing a stable and lasting relationship with the powerful Soviet Union and its dictator, Joseph Stalin.

Stalin's Prewar Policies

Before, during, and immediately after World War II, Stalin was at the center of any interactions with Russia. For over twenty years, Stalin had dominated Soviet political life (a longevity soon to be matched by Putin in a future Russia). Stalin dictated domestic policy and set the tone for foreign policy, reserving all major decisions for himself; clearly, he held the key to American foreign policy objectives in the USSR.

Upon reaching the top of the Soviet hierarchy in the early 1920s, Stalin still lacked the absolute powers he would later acquire. Initially he faced the problem of removing political rivals such as Trotsky, which he did at first by constant political maneuvering and intrigue (purges and assassinations would come later).²¹ In 1922, Lenin sponsored Stalin's appointment as general secretary, but soon changed his mind and tried to block Stalin from succeeding him. Lenin died in January 1924; by the end of the 1920s, Stalin was acknowledged as the *vozhd*, the unquestioned Russian leader and Lenin's true heir.²²

Stalin's many critics tend to portray him in black-and-white terms, as an unprincipled, paranoid, self-absorbed, isolated, vindictive autocrat who was intractably hostile to the West and ideologically committed to its destruction, even as he cut shrewd deals to achieve his ends over time. In this view, negotiating with Stalin was naïve. Current scholarship, however, challenges simple assessments. Stalin was indeed a brutal, cruel leader and a true believer in Communist ideology. At the same time, he was a skilled politician who could adapt to circumstances and make deals that satisfied the objectives of both parties. A source of perplexity to American leaders in the 1930s was whether Stalin was simply an unprincipled opportunist and rigid ideologue, or a calculating actor seeking to secure Russia's

²¹ Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) was a leading Bolshevik revolutionary and one of the seven members of the original Politburo in 1917. He and Stalin differed on many matters, and Stalin viewed him as a major competitor to succeed Lenin. Stalin succeeded in isolating and then eliminating Trotsky. In 1927, Trotsky was expelled from the Communist party and exiled, first in Kazakhstan and then outside the Soviet Union. After living in Turkey and Paris, Trotsky traveled to Mexico in 1937. Fearing that Trotsky was plotting his overthrow, Stalin ordered him assassinated in August 1940.

²² Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), p. 45.

interests in a hostile world. FDR favored the latter view and adjusted his strategy and tactics accordingly.

These developments took place amid darkening world affairs. Hitler came to power in January 1933 and quickly crushed opposition, achieved absolute control at home, and built a powerful military for adventures abroad, asserting a Germany unshackled from the restraints of the Treaty of Versailles.²³ Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936 (with Russia and Germany on opposite sides), and Japan invaded China in 1937. It was clear to any observer that the world was racing toward war.

Within this cascade of threats, Stalin desperately sought time for Russia to build industrial and military strength. In the early 1930s, Stalin saw three principal dangers facing the Soviet Union: a fascist Germany seeking to expand eastward, a capitalist Britain intent on destroying communism, and an aggressive Japan astride Soviet territory in the Far East. Meanwhile, America was a major concern. Stalin adopted policies to address these problems simultaneously.²⁴

His first move was détente with Germany. Soon after Hitler became chancellor, Stalin began sending personal emissaries quietly to Berlin to inquire privately into forming a Russo–German alliance against Britain and France. Hitler was unreceptive. So long as Western democracies continued to appease him, Hitler chose to expand German power slowly by assertive diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, rather than direct confrontation. Alliance with Stalin might provoke Britain and France and was thus detrimental to German interests.²⁵

With his early failure to woo Hitler, Stalin shifted tactics. Still pursuing additional time to gain muscle, Stalin tilted away from Germany and, in 1934, Russia joined the League of Nations. The following year, Russia negotiated defensive military alliances with France and Czechoslovakia, and from 1936 to 1939, Russia supported the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.²⁶

Changing tactics a third time in late 1938, Stalin reengaged Germany in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, a British capitulation that may have convinced

²³ For an illuminating account of the Treaty of Versailles and its reception by the Germans, see Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001).

²⁴ The discussion in this paper of Stalin's prewar maneuvering draws heavily on the following sources. Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974); Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: Court of the Red Tsar* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2003); and Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017).

²⁵ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, pp. 302-303.

²⁶ Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, pp. 209-279.

Stalin that Britain and its allies, although strong militarily when one compared the British and French force balance at the time with the nascent German army, lacked the will to stop Hitler.²⁷ It was time to revisit a security relationship with Germany, and this time Germany was receptive.²⁸ The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, concluded in August 1939 and containing a secret protocol to divide conquered territories, formally allied Moscow with Berlin.

Stalin's pact with Hitler lasted one year, nine months, and twenty-nine days. Evidence suggests that Stalin entered into the arrangement cognizant that Hitler could turn on Russia at any time, but, as he explained to his inner circle, the object was to buy time: "Of course it's all a game to see who can fool whom. I know what Hitler's up to. He thinks he's outsmarted me, but actually it's I who's tricked him."²⁹

Stalin delayed the inevitable clash with Germany, but miscalculated badly as to how much time he purchased.³⁰ In June 1941, with the German–Russian accord in shreds and German forces advancing into the Soviet Union on several fronts, Stalin faced an existential threat, both to the USSR and his continuing power. It was time to get Western help.

Stalin joins the Grand Alliance

For the first several days following the German invasion, Stalin was publicly silent and largely out of sight, leading many scholars to conclude that, having gambled and

²⁷ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, p.303.

²⁸ In May 1939, Stalin replaced his foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov (respected in the West as a highly professional diplomat) with one of his closest associates, Vyacheslav Molotov. This change was accompanied by a purge of Jews in the foreign ministry, a move designed to appeal to Hitler. Hitler, having decided secretly to invade Poland before the end of 1939, now wanted to secure his eastern flank. Hitler sent his foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, on a secret mission to Moscow to discuss a formal German–Soviet alliance. By the early hours of August 24, 1939, a treaty was ready for signature, known to history as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. The pact had two faces: the public was a fairly conventional non-aggression treaty; the secret, was a protocol dividing territories of Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland into German and Soviet spheres of influence. Soviet leaders denied the existence of the protocol until 1989, once Gorbachev was in power.

²⁹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, p. 312.

³⁰ Three of Stalin's fundamental assumptions were flawed. German military forces were not as weak as he thought in late 1939 (Stalin, like almost everyone at the time, was astonished at the effectiveness of Germany's *blitzkrieg* warfare). Polish, British, and French military forces were far weaker than Stalin imagined, even though they were superior to Germany on paper in almost all numerical indices of power. And it would take longer than Stalin anticipated to build Russian military strength, especially in light of the ravages that Stalin's purge of the military high command had wrought.

lost, he suffered a nervous breakdown and needed time to pull himself together.³¹ Recent scholarship based on eyewitness accounts suggests an alternative explanation: namely, that Stalin, tactically surprised by the sudden attack, was anxious and pessimistic in the first few days of fighting, but fully in control of his faculties. He conducted business around the clock, then withdrew to his *dacha* outside Moscow (probably on 29 June, a week after the invasion). Seeking to consolidate his position and deflect criticism, Stalin threatened to resign, knowing there was nobody to take his place. The threat frightened his associates, who knew there was nobody capable of replacing him, and rendered moot any potential opposition. This permitted Stalin to take full command of the wartime government on his own terms. The ploy of insincere resignation had a basis in Russian history dating to Ivan IV,³² as Stalin was well aware.

Whatever interpretation one accepts, however, scholars agree that after the initial shock of the German invasion, Stalin was clearly in command of Russian policy. Appealing to the West, he found a receptive audience, first in Britain and then the United States.

Churchill, desperate after a series of setbacks since 1939, would famously comment that he would in effect make a deal with the devil if necessary to defeat Hitler.³³ When Germany turned on Russia, Churchill immediately responded to Stalin's overtures by expressing his willingness to provide all assistance possible to the Russian resistance and sending a delegation to Moscow to seek a provisional alliance between Britain and Russia against the Axis powers.

As for the United States, since taking office in 1933, FDR had involved himself only sporadically in foreign affairs. Although he had watched a decade of unfolding crises in Europe and Asia with concern and was internationalist by persuasion,

³¹ For instance, Adam B. Ulam wrote in the 1970's, "We now know from Soviet sources that for several days, Stalin was unable to function, suffering from nervous prostration." *A History of Soviet Russia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 155.

³² See Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, translated from Russian by H. T. Williams (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), pp. 479-490. Radzinsky bases his account on the unpublished memoirs of Y. Chadayev who, at the time of the German invasion, was the administrative assistant to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars and the only note taker that Stalin permitted at Politburo and other sensitive meetings.

³³ Churchill, at one time one of the staunchest enemies of the Bolsheviks, was called back to power when Hitler invaded Poland, initially as first lord of the admiralty and, after Hitler launched his western campaign in May 1940, as prime minister of the wartime coalition government. Churchill rallied Britain as the tattered British army withdrew from Dunkirk, France fell, and Britain faced alone the full power of Germany in the aerial Battle of Britain and threatened invasion across the English Channel.

Roosevelt had to contend with strong pacifist sentiment at home and large voting blocs in Congress that sought to keep America out of European wars.³⁴ After war broke out in Europe in 1939, however, FDR involved himself increasingly in foreign affairs and initiated a confidential correspondence with Churchill that continued throughout the war.³⁵ FDR privately shared Churchill's conviction that Hitler must be defeated as a threat to Western civilization and sympathized with Britain's desperate circumstances after Dunkirk. But with his hands tied by a tangle of neutrality laws and by an antiwar public and isolationist Congress, FDR was confined to creative schemes of assistance such as the Destroyers for Bases Agreement in September 1940 and the lend-lease program of March 1941.³⁶

When Germany invaded Russia in June 1941, FDR was cautious in extending a promise of assistance, mindful of the need to prepare a largely anti-Soviet public for this major political turnabout. Roosevelt skillfully orchestrated the extension of lend-lease to Russia and began a private correspondence with Stalin, as he had with Churchill twenty months earlier. Historians now have access to the body of their private written exchanges and can trace the evolution of FDR's views and what he sought from the alliance, not only in wartime, but beyond.³⁷

The decisive turning point for U.S. involvement was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. America declared war with Japan on December 8th and Germany declared war on the U.S. two days later. Had Germany not done so, it is questionable whether America would have entered the European war so quickly or adopted a global strategy of Europe first.

³⁴ For a discussion of Roosevelt's approach to foreign policy during the 1930s, see Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

³⁵ The historian Warren F. Kimball is the editor of the three-volume complete collection of the Roosevelt-Churchill correspondence, published by Princeton University Press in 1984. Kimball also is the author of an interpretive history of the Roosevelt-Churchill relationship, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997), and of an excellent analysis of FDR's wartime diplomacy, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³⁶ By early 1941, FDR privately thought it inevitable that America would enter the war, but lacked public support and had nowhere near a majority in Congress to support military intervention in Europe. FDR approved secret American-British-Canadian (ABC) military staff talks in Washington, DC, in early 1941, took a number of administrative moves to reorganize the executive branch, and secured the appointment of key officials with a wartime role in mind. America's initial posture was to serve as the "arsenal of democracy," with the possibility of future expansion.

³⁷ Susan Butler, ed., *"My Dear Mr. Stalin": The Complete Correspondence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

With America engaged, Roosevelt formally joined Churchill and Stalin in a Grand Alliance to defeat Nazi Germany. While the three sides were aligned jointly against Germany, Russia did not join with the American and British in war against Japan.³⁸ Besides the defeat of Germany, Roosevelt had two equally compelling objectives for which he sought Stalin's aid. One was to persuade the Soviets to abandon their nonaggression pact with Tokyo and help defeat Japan. The other was to obtain and sustain Soviet support for a new approach to global security in the postwar world.

FDR's Vision of a Stable Postwar World

Bypassing the narrative of how the Grand Alliance actually fought the war, including tensions among the allies, disagreements on timing, priorities, and strategy, etc., this analysis focuses on interactions among the top leaders and their conflicting visions of a postwar world.

FDR revealed his vision in a number of venues—and was determined to enforce it.³⁹ He wanted above all to ensure that America remain engaged in the world and not retreat as it had after the First World War. A key to this vision was to anchor American policy in a recast vision, with the U.S. as the leader of the international order. He prepared American public opinion early on—for example, in his state of the union address in January 1941, almost a year before America entered the war,

³⁸Soviet and Japanese troops clashed from May to September 1939 in a brief but bloody border war on the Manchurian–Mongolian frontier. Georgy Zhukov, who later would lead the Russian forces that defeated Hitler on the eastern front, commanded the Soviet forces in the Far East at the time and scored a crushing victory over the Japanese. In September 1940, Japan signed a treaty of mutual military assistance (the Tripartite Pact) in Berlin. Japan was signaling the United States, neutral at the time, not to enter the war in the Pacific. In April 1941, Stalin signed a neutrality pact with Japan, in which both sides agreed to remain neutral if the other were at war with other parties.

³⁹ In addition to other works already cited in this paper, the following were consulted to understand Roosevelt's wartime diplomacy and his vision of the postwar world. James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973); W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York: Random House, 1975); Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990); Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Michael Beschloss, *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941-1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002); Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007); *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders* (New York: Harper, 2009); Michael Dobbs, *Six Months in 1945* (New York: Random House, 2012); and Richard Moe, *Roosevelt's Second Act* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

the president invited Americans to look forward to a postwar world founded on four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, and freedom from want and fear. He explained the latter as the fruit of “a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.”⁴⁰ Such a world, he argued, required American leadership. FDR promoted this theme in a number of speeches.

This vision was at odds with Churchill’s. The British wanted to recreate a postwar balance-of-power security system much like that before the war, to preserve Britain’s privileged position in its empire and commonwealth. Churchill envisioned a functioning global balance of power with regional spheres of influence policed and respected by the big three—the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. This agenda was clear to Roosevelt and he worked quietly to circumvent it and replace it with his own.⁴¹

In August 1941, in the waters off Newfoundland, Roosevelt attended his first major wartime conference with Churchill, armed with a general statement of war aims dubbed the Atlantic Charter, which lay the foundation for a new postwar organization—the United Nations—that FDR was sure would avoid the pitfalls of the League of Nations. FDR also broached his idea of a council of major powers that would police the world and enforce peace, an idea that evolved into the concept of the “four policemen” (the U.S., Britain, Russia, and China—a forerunner of the UN Security Council). Representatives of twenty-six allied nations came together in Washington in January 1942 to pledge their support to the principles of the Atlantic Charter.⁴²

⁴⁰ Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, January 6, 1941.

<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/pdfs/fftext.pdf>.

⁴¹ Roosevelt wanted Churchill to dismantle the British empire by granting independence to Britain’s colonies, replace the balance of power with a functioning world enforcement mechanism composed of the major powers, and think of spheres of influence as Roosevelt did, that is to say, as “open” spheres of influence such as found in Latin America.

⁴² The Atlantic Charter contained eight principles: no territorial aggrandizement, territorial changes only with the consent of the peoples concerned, the rights of peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live, equal access to trade and raw materials, cooperation to improve working conditions and economic standards, a stable and peaceful postwar world, freedom of navigation on the high seas, and enforced disarmament of aggressors.

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>.

At the Casablanca conference of January 1943, Roosevelt secured Churchill's consent to a policy of demanding unconditional surrender⁴³ from the Germans and Japanese. His purpose was to facilitate the reintegration of axis countries into the international community after the war and, through demilitarization, prevent their quick return to aggression, as had happened to Germany after World War I.

In the late summer and early fall of 1944, FDR carefully monitored discussions at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, that crafted the major postwar institutions for trade, finance, and security: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the United Nations, with a general assembly and security council. These institutions occupied a vital space in FDR's postwar vision. As G. John Ikenberry points out,

The Bretton Woods agreements were important because they served as a basis for building broader coalitions around a relatively open and managed order. It was a middle path that generated support from both the conservative free traders and the new enthusiasts of economic planning. It was agreed that just lowering barriers to trade and capital movement was not enough. The leading industrial states must actively supervise and govern the system. Institutions, rules, and active involvement of governments were necessary.⁴⁴

FDR believed the United States should lead this process.

Roosevelt did not develop his multi-dimensional vision of the postwar world from whole cloth or by convening special study groups to advise him. It emerged piecemeal, beginning when he was assistant secretary of the Navy in the Wilson administration during the World War I. Realizing this sweeping scheme would require compromises and tradeoffs, especially with Britain and Russia. FDR's strategy was to work with their leaders through backchannels, largely out of sight of the normal diplomatic process.

FDR could maneuver with Churchill within a common bond of language and culture, building a relationship in which even the most delicate actions were possible, such as placing troops under the command of foreign nationals, drawing up and implementing concrete plans for combined military operations, sharing highly sensitive intelligence, and developing a nuclear bomb in a cooperative, secret

⁴³ The other major agreements reached at Casablanca were that the next step in the European ground offensive would be the invasion of Sicily (Operation HUSKY) and that the strategic bombing campaign against Germany would be intensified.

⁴⁴ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 190.

endeavor. In dealing with Churchill, FDR had the upper hand. Britain needed the United States, not only to defeat Hitler but to shore up its declining economic power and offset radical nationalists in the British empire seeking independence. FDR exploited these vulnerabilities skillfully.

Dealings with Stalin were less certain. FDR placed a premium on developing a personal relationship with the premier and knew he must convince Stalin that the USSR was an equal partner in the Grand Alliance and that Soviet interests would be respected in alliance decisions. Roosevelt was never sure he understood Stalin's postwar vision, but he tried endlessly to draw Stalin out and provide incentives for continued cooperation after Germany was defeated. An optimist by nature, Roosevelt felt sufficient incentives could be found and could work.

Warren Kimball, a keen historian of wartime diplomacy, draws a distinction between the strategy and tactics of alliance diplomacy, on one hand, and underlying assumptions on the other. Kimball argues that FDR was willing to adjust his strategy and tactics as needed, but remained steadfast in his underlying assumptions.⁴⁵ Many of FDR's compromises are well known—for instance, tacitly acknowledging the Soviet spheres of influence in the Baltic region, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. Two of his assumptions were paramount, however, and these he never changed. One was that without something akin to his vision of the postwar world and its institutions, the world would revert to power politics that could easily lead to another devastating world war. The second was that it would be impossible to achieve a stable postwar security system without Soviet cooperation, and this meant engagement with Stalin.

In November 1943, FDR met Stalin for the first time, at the Tehran conference, considered by many historians the high point of the Grand Alliance.⁴⁶ Eight months

⁴⁵ Kimball, *The Juggler*, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁶ FDR and his party left the White House secretly on the evening of Thursday, 11 November 1943 to go to the Eureka Conference in Tehran. He paused briefly in Cairo for consultations with Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, then proceeded to Tehran, where he arrived on 25 November. FDR was eager to meet Stalin. He wanted to strike up a working relationship and personal bond and dispel Stalin's suspicions that the U.S. and Britain were ganging up on him. FDR went without elaborate briefing books or position papers. The issues he intended to discuss were general and largely political. He refused a fixed agenda, wanting to leave room for improvisation. FDR and Stalin met Sunday, 28 November, prior to the first plenary session later that afternoon. As the only head of state at the meeting, FDR was invited to preside. Throughout the discussions then and at later sessions, FDR encouraged an air of informality. While the political leaders were meeting, the American and British military chiefs of staff met with their Soviet counterparts. FDR departed Tehran in the early morning hours of 2 December 1943 and arrived back in Washington DC on 17 December. Sam Rosenman, FDR's speechwriter, later commented: "I do not remember ever seeing the President look more satisfied and

later, he was nominated by the Democratic party for a fourth term, with Senator Harry Truman his running mate. FDR immediately left for a war conference in the Pacific, so Truman did not have a chance to meet with him until 18 August 1943, when they had a semiprivate lunch at the White House (Roosevelt's daughter, Anna, joined them part of the time),⁴⁷ after which Truman went campaign trail. Re-elected on 7 November 1944, FDR was visibly ill and frail.⁴⁸

As vice president, Truman had only two private meetings with Roosevelt. Two days after the inauguration, Roosevelt left for the Yalta conference, which occupied most of February.⁴⁹ He addressed a joint session of Congress in March, conducted

pleased than he did that morning. He believed intensely that he had accomplished what he had set out to do—to bring Russia into co-operation with the Western powers in a formidable organization for the maintenance of peace.” Rosenman is quoted in Susan Butler in *My Dear Mr. Stalin: The Complete Correspondence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin*, p. 195. For an insider account of the discussions by FDR's interpreter at Tehran, see chapter nine of Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History: 1929-1969* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973).

⁴⁷ Although the conversation at the luncheon was largely on trivial matters, this appears to have been the occasion when FDR informed Truman, in general terms, about the Manhattan Project. Although the conventional wisdom is that Truman did not learn about the atomic bomb until after he became president (based in part on Truman's own comments in his memoirs), the historian Robert Ferrell, based on later oral interviews from Truman's closest associates, writes that at the luncheon, FDR “also told his running mate about the atomic bomb.” See Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1994), p. 172.

⁴⁸ For an illuminating discussion of FDR's ability to function despite his physical decline, see Joseph Lelyveld, *His Final Battle: The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

⁴⁹ The Yalta Conference (ARGONAUT) took place in the Crimea from 4 to 11 February 1945. When FDR, Churchill, and Stalin met at Yalta, the endgame of the war in Europe was approaching (Soviet forces were only forty miles from Berlin). FDR went to Yalta with several objectives foremost in his mind, including securing Stalin's support for the postwar institutions envisioned by FDR, and Soviet intervention in the Pacific War. Robert Dallek writes: “Roosevelt, in fact, had a complicated strategy for dealing with the Russians at Yalta. He still intended to tell Stalin nothing about the atomic bomb until the Soviets effectively demonstrated their sincere interest in postwar cooperation. Further, he intended to bargain with Stalin about the Far East and to split the differences that remained from the Dumbarton Oaks talks on the United Nations. But in Eastern Europe generally, and Poland in particular, he had little hope of deflecting Stalin from his course and was prepared to settle for agreements aimed more at satisfying American opinion than at rescuing the area from Soviet control. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*, *op cit*, page 507. FDR secured Stalin's promise to enter the Pacific War and provisional consent to FDR's vision for the United Nations. The conferees also agreed to the broad outlines of postwar occupation of Germany. For

miscellaneous business in Washington, and then departed March 30th to recuperate at Warm Springs, Georgia, where he died suddenly on 12 April 1945.

Truman Takes the Helm

Harry Truman differed radically from FDR in temperament, style, and personality.⁵⁰ Two distinctions are of especial importance. First, while Truman was comfortable mingling with foreign peers as a political leader, he had no foreign-policy experience and did not stress personal diplomacy as FDR had. Second, Truman trusted and used the state department in a way that Roosevelt had eschewed. Two of his secretaries of state in particular, Dean Acheson and George Marshall, were close advisers in dealing with deterioration of the relationship with the USSR from partnership to hostility.

Truman's understanding of Roosevelt's Soviet policy was derived mainly from having listened to or read FDR's public statements, not from private discussions. Whether FDR should have made a substantial effort to prepare Truman is much debated, and ultimately immaterial. Suffice it to say that FDR created the modern presidency; he had a compelling vision of an alternative to brute balance-of-power geopolitics and a determination to block the next world war. Truman shared those views, and now he had the helm.

When Truman took office, Hitler was on the verge of defeat—Soviet forces had closed in on Berlin from the east and American and British forces were entering Germany from the west. Eighteen days after FDR's death, Hitler (initially euphoric at the news) committed suicide in his bunker. Germany surrendered a week later, when it became apparent that the Americans and British would honor their commitment to unconditional surrender and refuse a separate peace that excluded Russia. Dealing with occupying the American zone in a lawless Germany and helping rescue a devastated and starving Europe awash with refugees while ending the bloodbath in the Pacific and leading the global community to a stable postwar world became the responsibility of Harry Truman.

The War's Endgame

Truman's first presidential action was to confirm that the San Francisco conference on the United Nations, scheduled to occur in two weeks, would take place as

an insider's account of the discussions by his interpreter, Chip Bohlen, see chapter eleven of Bohlen, *Witness to History*, *op cit*.

⁵⁰ See Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977); David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); and Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and A. J. Baime, *The Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and the Four Months that Changed the World* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

planned. Reportedly shaken by FDR's passing, Stalin reversed an earlier decision not to send his foreign minister to the San Francisco conference: Molotov would attend.

Four days after assuming office, Truman addressed a joint session of Congress in which he pledged to continue Roosevelt's policies. Truman was well respected on both sides of the aisle and in time formed a close alliance with Arthur Vandenberg, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (and chairman three years later when the Republicans regained the majority), that helped solidify FDR's position that the United States must remain take leadership in the postwar world.⁵¹

In July 1945, Truman traveled to Potsdam where he met with Churchill and Stalin to reach agreement on the occupation of formerly Nazi-controlled territories, discuss the process for negotiating European peace treaties, and consider how to end the war in the Pacific. Stalin confirmed his promise that when Germany was defeated, Russia would shift forces to the East, withdraw from the nonaggression treaty with Tokyo, and fight Japan.

Truman recorded in his diary on 18 July that "Stalin's luncheon was a most satisfactory meeting. I invited him to come to the U.S. Told him I'd send the battleship *Missouri* for him if he'd come. He said he wanted to cooperate with the U.S. in peace as we had cooperated in war, but it would be harder. Said he was grossly misunderstood in U.S. and I was misunderstood in Russia."⁵² Both agreed they would try to clear up misunderstandings at home.

Stalin privately told his aides that Truman was not up to the job of leading the United States,⁵³ but would find over time that he was sorely mistaken. The day before the Potsdam Conference, the first atomic bomb (an implosion plutonium device) was tested successfully in the deserts of New Mexico. Eight days later at Potsdam, Truman informed Stalin in general terms about the bomb.⁵⁴ Truman then joined with the British and Chinese in issuing an ultimatum to Japan to surrender unconditionally or face "prompt and utter" destruction. Tokyo ignored the warning

⁵¹ See Lawrence J. Haas, *Harry and Arthur: Truman, Vandenberg, and the Partnership That Created the Free World* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2016); and Hendrik Meijer, *Arthur Vandenberg: The Man in the Middle of the American Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁵² Robert H. Farrell, *Harry S. Truman & the Bomb: A Documentary History* (Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing Company, 1996), p. 30.

⁵³ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, p. 498.

⁵⁴ FDR had insisted at the outset of the Manhattan Project that the strictest conditions of secrecy be observed. The existence of the program was concealed from all but a few members of Congress, and even they were informed of the program in only the most general sense. Truman, with British consent, approached Stalin at the end of a session at Potsdam and told Stalin in vague terms that the U.S. had just tested a new weapon of enormous power.

and on 6 August 1945, an American B-29 dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Two days later, the Soviets launched a major offensive against Japanese forces in Manchuria, and on 9 August a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.⁵⁵

This truly was the war's endgame. Less than a week after Nagasaki, Emperor Hirohito, a godlike figure who never appeared or spoke in public, found himself head of a divided government in which fanatics in the army high command would choose national suicide over surrender, and intervened. In an unprecedented radio address, the emperor announced that Japan would surrender unconditionally and called on his subjects to support this decision. Japan's formal surrender took place on USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945. The Second World War was over.

From Ally to Adversary

When did the alliance break down and the Cold War begin? Was it 1944, when after lifting the siege of Leningrad, the Red Army rolled from victory to victory, reached the outskirts of Warsaw, ejected the Germans from Bulgaria and Rumania and paved the way for offensives that would capture Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East

⁵⁵ In September 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets—arguably America's most expert pilot at the time—was assigned to secretly organize America's first nuclear strike force, developing tactics for nuclear delivery, training the crews, and reaching a level of readiness where he could deploy and execute the strikes on short notice, if so ordered. He was told on 30 December 1944 to be ready to deliver a strike by 15 June 1945, and in March 1945 was informed that North Field on Tinian Island in the Pacific would be the staging base. His force consisted of B-29 long-range heavy bombers that had been specially modified in a program called Silverplate. On 29 June 1945, his unit—the 509th Composite Group, 20th Air Force—deployed to a specially guarded part of the Tinian facility. The new atomic device was tested successfully on 16 July in the deserts of New Mexico, and from the 26th to 28th of July, the bombs were delivered to Tinian by sea and air. Meanwhile, on 25 July, a military directive signed by President Truman was sent from Potsdam to Washington, directing that the load be delivered as soon as weather permitted visual bombing after 3 August on one of the targets (Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, or Nagasaki) and that additional bombs be delivered on one of those targets as soon as available. Truman departed Potsdam to return to Washington on 2 August. While en route home aboard the USS *Augusta*, Truman gave his final permission to execute the earlier directive. For further context, see Paul W. Tibbets, *Flight of the Enola Gay* (Columbus, OH: A Paul Tibbets Book, 1989); Charles W. Sweeney with James A. Antonucci and Marion K. Antonucci, *War's End: An Eyewitness Account of America's Last Atomic Mission* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1997); Ferrell, ed., *Harry S. Truman & The Bomb: A Documentary History*; J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt & Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, *Ruin from the Air: The Enola Gay's Atomic Mission to Hiroshima* (Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House Publishers, 1977).

Prussia? These military coups, argues Robert Dallek, “increased Stalin’s absolute control of the Soviet Union and made him less concerned about offending his allies.”⁵⁶ The Soviets were already emplacing the people and processes they would need to control the conquered territories.⁵⁷ Had Stalin already decided by then that he would abandon the alliance?

Was the breakdown of the alliance inevitable when Truman deployed a nuclear weapon against Japan? The bombing of Hiroshima shocked Stalin, who knew from Soviet espionage about the bomb, but was surprised that Truman would use it so quickly.

Did the Cold War start in 1946, when Stalin’s election-eve speech in Moscow alarmed Washington, DC, and incited George Kennan’s famous “long telegram”?⁵⁸ Was it 1947, when George Marshall, returning from a long and contentious foreign-ministers conference in Moscow, launched the Marshall Plan? Was it 1948, with the Berlin blockade? Or 1950, with the Korean War?

Scholars disagree, and this paper will not enter the debate. Worth noting is that Truman was showered with advice from all points of view and the two men he came to rely on and respect most, Dean Acheson and George Marshall, were among the last senior American officials to give up on cooperation with the Soviets.

⁵⁶ Dallek, *The Lost Peace*, pp. 53-54.

⁵⁷ See Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Random House, 2012).

⁵⁸ Elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR were scheduled for 10 February 1946—the first such elections in eight years. Stalin used election eve to deliver a speech to a group of Moscow voters in the Bolshoi Theater in which he reasserted the validity of Marxist-Leninist theory, drew a sharp contrast between capitalism and communism, and blamed the Second World War on the internal tensions of capitalist nations competing with one another. Among his other objectives, Stalin was rallying the Soviet people for continued sacrifices as they rebuilt their war-torn country. At the time, George F. Kennan (one of America’s leading experts on the Soviet Union) was serving as deputy head of mission in Moscow. Kennan found little new or remarkable in the speech and merely summarized it in his cable to Washington. On 13 February, the State Department asked Kennan for an interpretive analysis of the speech. Kennan responded with Moscow Embassy Telegram #511, summarizing his thoughts on what was driving Soviet policy, with arguments going far beyond the election-day speech. Kennan’s analysis reinforced the views of hardliners in Washington such as James Forrestal, who viewed any policy of cooperation with Russia as ill conceived. For further discussion of the long telegram, see chapter eleven in George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1967) and chapter ten in John Lewis Gaddis, *George Kennan: An American Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2011).

Truman never abandoned the major outline of FDR's vision for a stable postwar world, but in the absence of Russian cooperation, he was forced to adapt to the realities of confrontation and build a new grand strategy.

Toward a New Grand Strategy

Truman relied heavily on his senior advisers, especially Acheson and Marshall, to oversee the recasting of American strategy vis-à-vis the USSR.⁵⁹ While Acheson and Marshall were highly regarded as outstanding statesmen, they respected the president's prerogative to make policy decisions, supporting him even when they disagreed, and they respected his political skills in working with a Republican Senate (particularly with Vandenberg as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) to implement a sea change in American foreign policy.⁶⁰

America's new grand strategy emerged gradually. Although it was not fully in place under Truman's tenure, the important contours were sketched out and involved a handful of major themes: American leadership in the world community, containing further Russian expansion, a multinational Atlantic alliance with a stable European element, rehabilitating Germany and Japan, building a strong military, addressing the implications of nuclear weapons, and preventing a new world war.

Truman's first foreign-policy decision as president was to establish the United Nations as scheduled. Although he eventually found the UN less useful than hoped, American participation was symbolic of the many ways in which the United States had rejected its prewar isolationism and assumed the mantle of global leadership. As home of the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, the United States was geographically and symbolically at the heart of the postwar political and financial systems and at the center of world affairs.

⁵⁹ Truman, wanting someone with strong political standing in line for the presidency should he die, made James F. Byrnes his secretary of state in July 1945, with Dean Acheson his deputy. Truman's relations with Byrnes were strained, and in January 1947, Truman replaced him with George Marshall. When Marshall retired for health reasons at the end of Truman's first term, Truman turned to Dean Acheson, who became secretary of state in January 1949 and remained in office for the remainder of Truman's presidency. See Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945-1949* (New York: Viking, 1987); Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969); James Chace, *Acheson* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and *Affection and Trust: The Personal Correspondence of Harry S. Truman and Dean Acheson, 1953-1971* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ See Lawrence J. Haas, *Harry & Arthur: Truman, Vandenberg, and the Partnership That Created the Free World* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press, 2016); and Hendrik Meijer, *Arthur Vandenberg: The Man in the Middle of the American Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Russian expansionism and the slowly growing realization in Washington of just how weak Britain was after the war led to the Truman doctrine for Soviet containment, as unveiled to Congress in March 1947. This policy, combined with the rehabilitation of Europe's economy through the Marshall Plan and diplomatic and military activity, was essential in countering Soviet geopolitical expansion and was retained and refined by every Cold War president.⁶¹

After scoring an unexpected upset over governor Thomas Dewey in the presidential election of November 1948, Truman authorized diplomats to begin negotiations on the North Atlantic Treaty, which was signed in Washington, DC, on April 4, 1949.⁶² The institutional heart of the treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), would become what many believe to be the most successful alliance in history and a key component in successful Cold War navigation. Truman's close relationship with Vandenberg was again important to Senate acquiescence. The Marshall Plan meanwhile facilitated the recovery of key Western European allies, allowing a strong European arm of NATO to emerge.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, President Truman brought General Dwight D. Eisenhower out of retirement and sent him to Europe as the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) to oversee building a military structure for NATO. Eisenhower's decision to challenge Senator Robert Taft for the Republican presidential nomination in 1952 was motivated largely by his desire to keep America deeply involved in NATO, something he feared the Taft wing of the Republican Party would reverse.⁶³

Collaborating closely with Britain and France, the U.S. merged the occupation zones of Germany into a West German state that eventually regained its sovereignty and joined NATO as a chief member. America's commitment to NATO gave European states a secure basis from which to allow West Germany to regain its economic strength and rearm, despite long memories of Germany's reputation for aggression.

In Japan, the United States faced a different proposition. America's early vision for security in the Asia Pacific region was based on the hope that Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government would unify and economically revive China, but the Truman administration came to realize this was unlikely.⁶⁴ In October 1949, the Chinese

⁶¹ For background on the development of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan in a work that Dean Acheson considered definitive and, in fact, recommended to President Truman when he was writing his memoirs, see Joseph Marion Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955).

⁶² For background on the genesis of NATO, see Don Cook, *Forging the Alliance* (New York, NY: Arbor House/William Morrow, 1989).

⁶³ See Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ In late 1945, President Truman called General George C. Marshall out of retirement to head a mission to China to negotiate an end to the civil war between

communists won a long-raging civil war and proclaimed the People's Republic of China. Given the strong animosity against Japan among American allies in the Pacific, the United States managed its security relations in the region primarily through bilateral security treaties.

America's military buildup was slow to achieve. In the immediate aftermath of the war, demobilization proceeded rapidly, leaving most American combat forces ill prepared for action, and Truman capped military spending so as not to destabilize the economy. Meanwhile Congress ended the draft and refused the administration's proposal for universal military training and America's embryonic nuclear forces were caught up in the general chaos of postwar reversion to a civilian economy. The crises of 1948, most prominently the Soviet coup in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade, began a change in course that was cemented after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. By that time, the U.S. was on the road to a large standing military heavily dependent on nuclear deterrence.

Then there was the problem of the bomb. Realizing that nuclear proliferation was inevitable and that nuclear weapons posed an unprecedented risk to the United States, Truman attempted to control nuclear weapons through arms control via the Baruch Plan, proposed in June 1946.⁶⁵ When it became obvious that the Soviet

the Chinese Kuomintang government, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communists, led by Mao Tse-tung. After months of effort, Marshall conceded he could not achieve any lasting compromise. His dealings with the Kuomintang nationalists reinforced perceptions in the administration that their government was out of touch with the people and thoroughly corrupt.

⁶⁵ At the London Foreign Ministers meeting lasting from 11 September to 2 October 1945, discussion deadlocked between the Soviets on the one hand, and the other wartime allies on the other. No meaningful progress was made on the postwar peace plans for Europe. The British felt that the unresolved nuclear issue was at the root of the problem, and in November 1946 prime minister Clement Attlee and his Canadian counterpart, MacKenzie King, came to Washington to meet with Truman. The outcome of this summit was a communiqué (Agreed Declaration) issued on 15 Nov that proposed that all nations should have access to basic scientific information required for peaceful uses of atomic energy, that an arrangement would be drawn for arrangements to control atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its peaceful use, and that one the arrangement with effective safeguards was in place, atomic weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction would be eliminated from national arsenals. The communiqué called for taking the matter to the newly formed United Nations. At a foreign ministers meeting in Moscow, Stalin agreed to take the matter to the UN. When the United Nations convened for the first time in its temporary location in London in January 1946, it created the UN Commission on Atomic Energy to take up the matter of international controls. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Byrnes had turned to his deputy, Dean Acheson, and charged him with coming up with the American proposal. Acheson and his fellow committee members were assisted by a panel of experts led by David Lilienthal

Union was determined to build its own nuclear stockpile with no constraints, the U.S. slowly evolved to a two-track approach that kept the possibility of arms control open but emphasized fielding a strong nuclear deterrent—something that became more urgent after the first Soviet nuclear test in 1949.

(who later would become the first chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission). The Acheson-Lilienthal group included General Leslie Groves, director of the Manhattan Project, and J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos Laboratory that designed and produced the first bombs. The Acheson–Lilienthal group arrived at a scheme (whose technical component was largely the work of Oppenheimer) to propose an international authority to regulate atomic energy by a system of licensing and inspections. All thorium and uranium mined would be the property of the international authority, and under appropriate licensing arrangements, denatured U-235, U-233, and plutonium could be leased to national authorities for peaceful uses (research or the production of radioactive isotopes and power). Once an effective international system of safeguards was in place, national arsenals of nuclear weapons would be banned. The Acheson–Lilienthal report went to Truman on 21 March 1946. On the recommendation of Secretary Byrnes, and with an eye to the eventual need for Congressional ratification of any international arrangement, Truman appointed Bernard Baruch to be the American representative on the UN Atomic Energy Commission and present the plan. After wide consultation within the government, Baruch added sanctions for alleged violations (presumably including, as necessary, the use of force) approved by a security council voting without the right of veto. On 7 June 1946, Truman approved the revised plan. Baruch presented this phased approach to nuclear disarmament to the UN Atomic Energy Commission on 14 June 1946. Three days later, the Soviet representative, Andrei Gromyko, presented Moscow’s alternative proposal, which called for destruction of all existing nuclear weapons three months after the convention took effect, with the system of international control then to be put in place, and with no elimination of the right of permanent party veto. An inconclusive stalemate ensued. Baruch remained US representative until 4 January 1947, by which time the UN Atomic Energy Commission had prepared a report reflecting the deadlock and submitted it to the security council. Truman appointed Warren R. Austin to replace Baruch, and on 11 February 1947, debate began on the matter. The stalemate continued, and debate became a matter of competing public relations exercises. For further information, see Chapter 17 of Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969). See also Chapters 15 and 16 of Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr., *The New World: A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission, Volume I, 1939-1946* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962); and *Toward Effective International Atomic Energy Control* (Washington, DC: U.S. State Department Publication 2713, 1947).

Concluding Thoughts

When Harry Truman left office in January 1953, the major elements of the American grand strategy were firmly in place. Through the forty turbulent years of the Cold War, legacy assembled from Roosevelt's vision provided a framework for Truman's successors (Eisenhower through George H. W. Bush).

FDR's greatest fear, of a third world war, shared by Truman, but was evaded—partly by luck, but largely because of wise policy choices. America managed the transition in relations with Russia from ally to enemy in a way that stabilized the central competitors (who quickly became nuclear) and shifted armed conflict to the shadows (largely through proxies in the third world) and created an intense spy-on-spy war.

Along the way, the United States learned the strategic value of patience. In the realm of nuclear-arms control, for instance, America persisted, and what appeared highly improbable, if not impossible, in 1946—arms-control arrangements with intrusive onsite inspection—became possible by Cold War's end. Proliferation did not cascade unrestrained, again largely due to American leadership in championing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and giving nations incentives to join it. The nuclear-arms race was dangerous and the possibility of conflict escalation to the nuclear threshold through miscalculation never went away. America's security policy from Truman onward followed two rules: be prepared to negotiate arrangements to restrain and control arms, and simultaneously ensure the military clout to respond effectively to cheating and technical advances.

America also solidified its belief in the importance of alliances. NATO survived many crises in which observers forecast its imminent demise. In the Asia-Pacific region, where multilateral alliance structures were unattainable, the U.S. developed a network of bilateral alliances with World War II friends like Australia, former enemies like Japan, and divided countries like South Korea.

While far from perfect, America's managed transition in its relations with Russia/the Soviet Union in the years following World War II offers many lessons worth pondering today. But that is another story.

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