

# Planning the Post-War World

What FDR, Churchill, and Stalin agreed to at Tehran is still visible in Europe 76 years later.

by Conrad Black



Last Sunday's Fox News program *Special Report*, on the Tehran Conference of 1943 (about which their news anchor, Bret Baier, has just published a book), revisited the postwar division of Europe and the Cold War that followed for 45 years. Because President Roosevelt died at 63, in office and without writing any memoirs or diaries, he became an easy target for McCarthyite Republicans claiming he was duped by Stalin, disgruntled British imperialists blaming FDR for the evaporation of their empire, Gaullist French alleging that the Anglo-Saxons couldn't protect Europe, and neutralist social democrats, such as West Germany's Willy Brandt and Canada's Pierre Trudeau, arguing that Roosevelt and Churchill had given the Kremlin eastern Europe as a sphere of influence. They all failed to remember that in 1940 Germany, Italy, Japan, and France (after it surrendered to Germany) were all hostile dictatorships, and five years later they were all on the way

to being prosperous democratic allies of the Americans and British. In the interim, as between the Big Three, the Soviet Union took 90 percent of the casualties sustained in subduing Nazi Germany, and all they had to show for it was the unpopular occupation of Eastern European countries they had pledged to vacate and a Cold War they could not win.

The Baier program made the point that the British were reluctant collaborators in D-Day, as they were fearful of failure and wanted to continue to wear Germany down with the air campaign and peripheral actions such as Italy while leaving the Soviet Union to sustain 10,000 casualties a day fighting the Germans. It also alleged that Roosevelt was "complicit" in the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe after the war. Churchill and his chief of the general staff, Sir Alan Brooke, thought that D-Day would be a disaster like Dunkirk, and Roosevelt thought that if a serious operation was launched in France, once it got across the Rhine, the Germans would continue to fight like tigers against the Russians but would give way quickly in the West, to put their country in the hands of civilized enemies with whom Germany had observed the Geneva Convention. He was also concerned that if Stalin thought the western Allies were just waiting for Germany and Russia to bleed each other to death, they would make a new pact and control the whole Eurasian land-mass with the Japanese.

The key to the Tehran Conference was that since the U.S. legation at Tehran was outside the city, and traveling between the embassies would involve security risks, it was advisable for Roosevelt to stay in either the British or the Soviet embassy. He chose the Soviet because he wanted to line up Stalin behind the cross-Channel invasion of France rather than attacking up the Adriatic or in league with Turkey (a neutral state), as Churchill was proposing. Stalin entirely agreed with Roosevelt, as Roosevelt ascertained a few minutes after he arrived, and he was able as conference chairman (because he

was the only chief of state of the three – King George VI and Soviet president Kalinin were his technical protocol analogues) to call upon Stalin to express his preference for the main western Allied attack on Hitler's Europe (Italy was a comparative side show). Churchill and Brooke believed Stalin had gulled Roosevelt and only favored the cross-Channel landing because he too thought the Germans would hurl the Anglo-Americans into the sea and facilitate his westward advance. Stalin may have believed that, but Roosevelt thought Churchill and Brooke had been traumatized by their experiences on the Western Front in World War I and underestimated what could be achieved by overwhelming Allied advantages in tanks and aircraft.

Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin all recognized that, as in all European wars since the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, whoever controlled Germany would be the winner. The Allied foreign ministers had already established a European Advisory Commission, whose chief task would be to determine the Allied occupation zones of Germany. Roosevelt was opposed to this because of his belief that the western powers could take almost all of Germany. Churchill was afraid that because the British land forces on the western front would be only about 300,000, a fifth of the American contingent and much smaller than the Russian, Britain would end up with a small occupation zone, so he agreed with the Soviet proposal for three approximately equal zones. At the Tehran Conference, in complete secrecy, unknown even to the European Advisory Commission members, Poland's eastern and western borders were both moved 200 miles to the west, as a preliminary concession to the Soviet Union for having borne the German invasion. By the summer of 1944, it was clear that this would have the effect of making most of the Soviet occupation zone of Germany part of pre-war Poland. It was also clear that large numbers of ethnic Germans, from as far east as the Volga, were moving west ahead of the retreating German army and being evacuated from the Baltic states by ship. When Roosevelt and Churchill

met at Quebec for the second time in September 1944, the western Allies had liberated Paris and were approaching the Rhine. The Russians were at Warsaw, and it appeared that the West would have a good chance to occupy most of post-war Germany, so Roosevelt consented to the Churchill-Stalin occupation-zones proposal.

Roosevelt's service chiefs told him that if the atomic bomb was not successful, Japan would have to be subdued in an amphibious landing, and as many as a million Allied casualties would result (the Americans would take nearly 80,000 casualties at Iwo Jima and Okinawa alone). Accordingly, they urged him to obtain Soviet participation in the Japanese war to absorb some of the casualties. Stalin was going to take what he wanted from the Japanese anyway. Stalin did agree to enter the war against Japan three months after the end of the war with Germany, and did so. Stalin also agreed to participate in the United Nations Organization, which Roosevelt intended as a means of disguising by collegialization the post-war domination of the world by the chief victorious powers, and as a method of sugar-coating the defeat of the domestic isolationists by making the world seem less dangerous than they had feared. At the Yalta Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt also obtained Stalin's agreement on the Declarations on Poland and Liberated Europe, which assured their liberation, independence, and democratic selection of government.

Roosevelt's plan was to use America's nuclear monopoly and economic might to secure Stalin's compliance with the terms of the Yalta agreement, once the atomic bomb was known to be effective and the Japanese had surrendered. He was "complicit" in the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe to the extent that he helped ensure that the Red Army cleared the Germans out of those countries, but he and Churchill never acquiesced in durable Soviet occupation of what became the Iron Curtain countries. President Eisenhower opened the first Great Power

summit conference in ten years at Geneva in 1955 by demanding that the USSR adhere to its commitments to liberate Eastern Europe. It was Roosevelt's strategic team: President Truman, Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, and MacArthur, Dean Acheson, George Kennan, and Charles Bohlen, who designed and led the institutions, especially NATO and the Marshall Plan, that ultimately won the Cold War. As was mentioned on the Baier program, Churchill was not blameless in creating the myth of his own perfect insight and Roosevelt's naïveté; he told the king that "the British donkey is between the Russian bear and the American buffalo, but is the only one that knows the way home." He also said, of Roosevelt and Truman, that at the decisive moment, "one was too ill to act and the other too new to the task to know what to do." This was inaccurate and self-serving. There is plenty of credit owing to do justice to them both.

Roosevelt's assistance to the democracies in 1940 and 1941, as he sought and won a third term as president, and his success in enlisting Stalin to support the cross-Channel invasion of France (even though it ultimately frustrated his desire to occupy Germany) over the protests of Churchill, who was skeptical, were among the great triumphs of statesmanship of modern history. Churchill's valorous leadership through the Battles of Britain and of the Atlantic, and his disguise of the descent of Great Britain to second rank of world powers by shielding it with the cloak of his own prestige, though unintended, were also immense accomplishments. Churchill and Roosevelt were like a relay team, the first as a romantic imperialist holding the fort for democracy and the second as the chief creator of a new world safe for democracy and pursuing enhanced prosperity and equality throughout the world. The second half of the gigantic achievements of both men got underway at Tehran. Together and almost unto themselves at first, they secured the future of Western civilization. To judge from the program, Bret Baier's book may

be worth a read.

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