THE UNITED STATES AND WORLD WAR II: CONFLICTING VIEWS OF DIPLOMACY

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As the world currently experiences rapid transformation, one factor appears most obvious: the United States no longer holds dominating influence over the foreign policies of most free world nations. Whether it be the tragic conflict in Vietnam, surging European nationalism, Red China's admission to the United Nations, or the symbolic trips of Soviet leaders to "western" states, one has witnessed the demise of American leadership.

If the Washington viewpoint held sway in the world's capitals, when did it gain that position? John O'Sullivan, writing for the *Democratic Review* in 1845 anticipated that a century later the United States would be on a mission to humanize the world. The Washington government may have sputtered after the Spanish American War or World War I, but it hesitated only for a moment after the Second World War. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had proclaimed the United States to be the arsenal of democracy and later remarked that the second global conflict was the war to end all wars.

The diplomacy of World War II has become the starting point for the rise and fall of United States world leadership. In examining that historical experience, Americans have been affected by their attitudes towards the present, a truism applicable to the nation's entire past. Accordingly, the witch hunting right of the early 1950's charged that President Roosevelt and his advisors were too soft on communism, permitting the loss of Asia and parts of Europe to Moscow's orientated marxists. Counterattacking "court historians" claimed that the Soviet betrayal of the agreed principles for peace established a divided world. A sense of neo-revisionism appeared early in the 1960's questioning the correctness of United States policy. These writers explained that Roosevelt and his advisors naively looked upon the Soviet Union as a maligned giant who would respond to sympathetic treatment and that Britain was a misguided friend whose policies needed to be changed for her own good and for that of the world. More recent writers, influenced by the Vietnam war, have looked upon America's World War II diplomacy as an act of imperialism. Emerging from the war as an economic giant, conscious of its power, the United States aimed at orienting the world to its own liking, denying the rise of the world's "Left" and growth of USSR's international position.

Respectively representing these four points of view are: George N. Crocker, *Roosevelt's Road to Russia* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959); Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged And the Peace They Sought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Gaddis Smith, *American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-*

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1945 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965); and Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1969).

A self-proclaimed student of history, and former Assistant United States Attorney and wartime officer, Crocker has accused Roosevelt and his close advisors of being too friendly with the Soviet Union. In particular, Harry Hopkins comes off as a power-greedy individual whose influence over the President surpassed that of the moralist Secretary of State Cordell Hull. To Crocker, President Roosevelt goaded Japan into attacking Pearl Harbor in order to permit American entry into the European war, and then deliberately pursued a policy that ingratiated himself with Premier Josef Stalin. The President's refusal to permit an allied invasion of the Balkans insured Soviet advances into Eastern Europe. The cross channel invasion in 1944 halted the allied advance through Italy into Austria and the Balkans, again providing assistance to the eventual domination of East Europe. Roosevelt's indifference towards Turkish entry into the war served only the Soviet cause, which was the communalism of Eastern Europe.

Crocker charged that the American insistence on German and Japanese unconditional surrender laid prostrate those nations whose geographic positions and historic roles would have made them bulwarks against communist expansion. The capitulation of Poland to the Soviet Union's orbit without protest completed the European surrender.

In the Pacific Theater, Roosevelt invited Soviet participation, granting territorial rewards in return, thus insuring a communist victory in China. Crocker concluded that having violated the high moral principles of the Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt paved the way for Soviet entry into a post war world on terms favorable to herself.

Representing a more sympathetic view of Roosevelt's policy and at the same time balancing Crocker's right wing attack, has been Herbert Feis. Beginning in 1931 Feis commenced a sixteen year career in federal government, serving as an economic advisor in both the War and State Departments. His mammouth study of World War II diplomacy earned the Liberty and Justice Book Award. Feis viewed the United States as an active allied partner by 1941, but that the Pearl Harbor attack turned the American effort into a full committment. Feis believed that the wartime coalition was forced by military necessity, while political ambitions drove it apart by 1945. Feis has been sympathetic to President Roosevelt and his advisors, particularly Cordell Hull.

A freer world was the American objective as witnessed by the principles formed in the Atlantic Charter and Declaration of a Liberated Europe. This high sounding rhetoric was satisfactory to Winston Churchill provided that the British Empire remained intact. Stalin's concern with friendly governments on his borders did not negate his acceptance of these lofty ideals. Churchill mistrusted the Soviet chief of state and desired a clear demarcation of spheres of influence in Europe. Roosevelt, on the other hand, believing that he would gain Stalin's trust and friendship, was not anxious to finalize decisions made under the duress of war. Rather, the President hoped to postpone these matters until a later period when cooler heads prevailed. A true international community, as envisioned in the United Nations appeared most logical to FDR.

Military necessity prompted respective viewpoints in the European theatre. Stalin had been anxious for a cross channel invasion as early as 1942 in order to alleviate the heavy German pressure on the Eastern front. Roosevelt desired the same, believing that it would also bring a quicker victory over Hitler's war machine. Churchill wanted to strike at Germany via Europe's "soft underbelly" which would have had the dual affect of protecting British Middle Eastern interests, and limiting Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. As the battles rolled back the guns of fascism and nazism, Roosevelt had come to realize the meaning of friendly states on the Soviet Union's flank: Soviet preponderance in the internal affairs of these nations. The Polish model presented the clearest example. Only direct conflict with the Soviets could have altered these cold facts of life, something Roosevelt felt he could not afford because of demands in the Pacific Theatre. Finally, the German occupation zones were only a reflection of the actual military situation.

In writing about the Pacific War, Feis explained that the United States had been forced to go it alone because British concern rested primarily in Europe, and the Soviets enjoyed the privilege of a ten year non-aggression pact with Japan. The corrupt government of Chiang Kai-shek, added to his obsession with Mao Tse Tung, negated any meaningful Chinese contribution to the war. Again military necessity forced Roosevelt's hand. Not knowing atomic weapons would be available, American military leaders estimated an additional eighteen months of fighting in the Pacific after Germany's surrender. To shorten that projection Soviet military aid appeared essential, and thus Roosevelt willingly lured Stalin with territorial prizes.

Feis concluded that the hope for a more democratic and free world dwindled as the war drew to a close because of Soviet demands and physical presence beyond her borders, not because of American coddling as Crocker claims.

Illustrative of neo-revision thinking has been Gaddis Smith, a professor of history at Yale University, who broke no new ground in his brief study of World War II diplomacy. The importance of this work rests on the author's view that the United States acted on the basis of hopes and illusions, not pursuing the wisest policies. The President and his closest advisors were pessimistic about the world's future if the Soviet demands were not met, but were optimistic that the USSR's behavior could be shaped by western influence. Smith viewed Roosevelt's desire for any early cross channel invasion as a means to halt the Soviet demand for a treaty in violation of the Atlantic Charter. Elsewhere, the American fear of a post war revolution in France caused Roosevelt to make insidious demands concerning German occupational zones, so that American troops would not be near the French border once the war had ended. Failure to alter the Soviet Union's policy in Poland because of the belief that Soviet troops would be needed in the Far East was another mistake. Despite advice to the contrary from several sources, Roosevelt's view of a strong China under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership was equally poor. Finally, the United States had sought to correct the errors of British imperialism in the Middle and Near East, a visionary dream at best.

Smith concluded that at the root of America's policy problems had been the tendency to think about unfamiliar areas of the world in terms of analogies drawn from this nation's experience. While Smith avoids clear judgement on the post war world if Roosevelt had pursued another path, he has presented a scholarly critique of the road traveled.

Most stinging in the evaluation of American wartime diplomacy has been Gabriel Kolko, professor of history at the State University of New York in Buffalo. A member of the "New Left" school of thought, Kolko views the American past in economic terms. With regard to World War II, Kolko has asserted that the United States used its economic power to undermine the British empire, and selfishly advanced American post war economic interests. Also, Roosevelt, characterized as an intellectual lightweight, tried to suppress the undeniable force of the left: those tortured men and women trying to create a better life for themselves. Finally, the United States refused to accept the USSR's rightful role in Europe, resisting Soviet compromise efforts, while constantly aiming at the emergence of a weak Soviet state after the war.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull emerged in this work as the architect of American policy. Couched in lofty and idealistic terms, the "Hullian" view sought a world of free trade and equal access to raw materials, in which, only the United States, unscathed by war, would be able to profit. To achieve that end, a stern peace with Germany and Japan had been rejected in favor of their reintegration into a new liberal world of capitalism. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund were to become instruments of neocolonialism. Middle Eastern shieks were wooed by the United States in an effort to undercut British hegemony in that area of the world. The erroneous American belief that Chiang Kai-shek could bring forth a strong and united China had been only a facade, for the desire to capitalize on the vast potential Asian market proved to be the ultimate objective.

In contrast to Smith, Kolko viewed the delay of the cross channel invasion as a deliberate play by President Roosevelt, hoping that Soviet strength would be sapped on the Eastern front. Only when the Russians broke the Nazis' lines did the invasion come, and then as a means to counter the feared Soviet advantage in Eastern Europe. The desire to overthrow the old order from the Baltic to the Adriatic was not communist inspired, but rather the result of years of oppression imposed upon humanity there by the old autocracies. The Soviets effectively limited local communist participation in these movements to the left, a fact denied by American policy makers. Blind to the real desires of Eastern Europeans, the United States sought to reestablish the old order, keeping the door ajar for economic penetration.

Kolko viewed the United States creating spheres of influence in Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, while at the same time denying the Soviet Union's right to do so in Eastern Europe. The United States ignored the Soviet argument that American domination of Italy and Japan, and British subjugation of Greece had set precedents for Soviet activity in the Eastern European states.

Soviet policy lacked a master plan, Kolko claimed. Rather, she had been cautiously concerned with security and economic recovery. The United States, on the other hand, pursued an aggressive policy, based on economics, denying legitimacy to the desires and realities of a changing world. Unlike Smith's view of erroneous American policy, Kolko charged that the United States must take heavy responsibility for the divergent paths traveled with the USSR. The end result of this policy — two spheres of influence — had been the same conclusion reached by Crocker, although each author has presented different reasoning. Standing alone, Herbert Feis has maintained that a Soviet hardened attitude prevented a more just peace.

Judging the validity and significance of each work has brought a complete dismissal of Crocker's "conspiratorial" thesis. The preponderance of sources he utilized were either newspapers or other secondary works, most of them revisionist in their tone, with precious little use of primary materials. His picking and choosing of isolated quotations by government officials obviously had been a biased effort. Finally, to write that the German and Japanese militarists were people with whom Americans had minor difficulties proved to be neither history nor scholarship.

The neo-revisionist approach of Gaddis Smith has been based primarily on the use of American sources, but the aims and policies of other nations were presented. He achieved his goal: the misconceptions, frustrations and achievements of United States policy are clear. The area specialist will most likely frown at the lack of "black and white" judgements, but the general reader would do well to start with this volume because it provides a concise and vivid broad sweep of World War II diplomacy, awakening the reader to many of the diplomatic problems of the war. It opens the door to a better understanding of the heavier volumes.

Most provocative has been Gabriel Kolko. In light of the changing world over the last twenty-five years, and American reaction to it, the reader might agree that the emerging "left" was never understood in Washington. Kolko's other main point, that the United States sought to utilize its economic power to create its own type of world is suspect. Like Crocker, he has chosen official commentary only to his advantage. For example, he excludes discussion of Cordell Hull's idealism and hope for a more orderly post war world. Rather, Kolko chose only to relate Hull's economic statements. Although his vast use of source material is impressive, Kolko's haphazard method of referencing has left many thoughts without substantiation. Kolko has provided an imposing study, brilliant in ideas, but short on documentation.

Herbert Feis has been equally impressive in his use of source materials, but unlike Kolko, has been more substantive in his documentation. The author's chief deficiency, however, has been his employment by the State and War departments during World War II, and thus his opinions most likely have been influenced accordingly. The spirit of accommodation that Roosevelt sought with Stalin appeared genuine, as was the Soviet determination to control Eastern Europe, the cause for parting of ways.

The results of this literature points to the need for deeper investigation of World War II diplomacy. The historian will be helped, hopefully soon, by President Richard Nixon's announcement that some forty nine million pages of relative material will be declassified. However, the story will remain incomplete as long as Soviet documents are denied scrunity.

Several conclusions also can be reached as a result of these works. First, and most obvious, military necessity predicated political decisions. Second, American decision makers did not understand the faults of the world's old order. That beneath the surface were seething causes for more socially and politically responsible governments. Third, despite public adherence to the high ideals of a freer world, Great Britain had no intentions of sacrificing her empire. The United States was incorrect to assume that Britain would let her empire go. Fourth, the goals and objectives of the Soviet Union were not understood in Washington. A sense of the USSR's historic past, a capacity Winston Churchill possessed, was not available in the United States. Thus, dealings with Stalin began poorly. Fifth, in trying to postpone decision making until the war's end when presumably clearer minds would prevail, Roosevelt's efforts were in vain.

In summary, the United States learned little from her World War I experience. By retreating from the international scene after 1920, the United States did not understand the altered world situation that existed in 1945. Policy makers in Washington apparently tried to deal with a world of the past and had failed.