



Winston Churchill's Evolving Views of Russia, 1917-1953, Reconsidered

Historical Retrospectives Symposium

John Lukacs , Nicholas X. Rizopoulos

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Winston Churchill, by Yousuf Karsh, 1941.

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Introduction

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: I'm Nick Rizopoulos. Welcome to the first of these experimental symposia that we are trying out for the first time at the Carnegie Council. I think—in fact, I'm positive—that they are going to be very successful. How can they not be, since we start with John Lukacs as our guest?

The idea is to try something different. As some of you know, for the last dozen years or so, I have been running something called the [Foreign Policy Roundtable](#) here for a very small group of

people, in a seminar format, mostly journalists and editors.

Now the time has come to do something else that I have always loved doing, which is this historical retrospective, which at different times in my career I have tried out, in the old [Lehrman Institute](#) 20 years ago and then later at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#).

I thought, with [Joel Rosenthal](#)'s encouragement, that we should see if it might work even better in this particularly cozy setting of the Carnegie Council, and thanks to a nice little grant from the [Carnegie Corporation](#), through the good offices of my dear friend [Steve Del Rosso](#), we are able to do these two symposia, one today, one in May, as you know. You will get a whole new round of invitations for the May 13th one.

What we are going to try to do today is not only to have an eminent person talk to us about something that he knows more about than anybody else alive in the world today—I really can say that without exaggeration—but then to have enough time for real discussion, conversation between us and you, for an hour and a half if need be, and get a chance to ask as many questions as you want. You ask a question and John will answer you, and if you want to do a follow-up question, you'll be able to do that as well. To me, that is the fun of this kind of a meeting.

I'm calling them "symposia," a good Greek word. We will see what we will see.

John has prepared a lecture on the subject of [Churchill](#) and Russia. It will range chronologically from the very beginning of Churchill's interest in Russia, meaning back in 1915, at the time of the [Dardanelles-Gallipoli fiasco](#), all the way to 1955 and beyond.

Only John Lukacs could pull off such a tour de force, cover so much ground and so much complicated history in the time that we have given him. But then, as I say, we'll have plenty of time to discuss things with him and follow up and ask questions.

My good friend [Michael Mandelbaum](#)—he and I actually met John together, at the same time, in 1981, in the old Lehrman Institute, when John Lukacs, whom Michael and I knew by reputation but hadn't yet met at that point, was a research fellow and was writing a very wonderful book, of which we used chapters in progress in a series of seminars we did in 1981 and 1982.

The book came out three years later. It was [Outgrowing Democracy: A History of the United States in the Twentieth Century](#), which has been recently reprinted by Yale University Press. We became very, very good friends and have remained so ever since.

So I asked Michael, who was nice enough to come up from Washington for this, to sit with us at this table and help get the discussion going, in case it's slow in the beginning. But, really, it's not the question of the three of us dominating things and running things. After the lecture, I hope you will all come in and enjoy yourselves.

John is an extraordinary scholar. For my money, he is the best historian I know still actively working and writing, in the English-speaking world certainly. I know of nobody else who knows as much about Churchill and [Hitler](#) and [George Kennan](#) and many others than John.

He's a political historian, a diplomatic historian, a military historian, and an intellectual historian. He has written some wonderful volumes of memoirs. The most recent one, again published by Yale University Press, is called [Last Rites](#). It's a wonderful read. And long may he live and keep writing these wonderful books that he has been writing all these many years—close to 30 by now in number.

Without further ado, thank you for coming. I hope you enjoy yourselves. John, thank you so much for doing this for all of us and for the Carnegie Council. Professor Lukacs.

Remarks

JOHN LUKACS: Nicholas, thank you very much.

I have a dual purpose in this talk, Churchill and Russia. The first is that there are a lot of people, not unreasonably, who say that Churchill ought to be criticized seriously because he had illusions about Russia and [Stalin](#) during the Second World War, that the same Churchill who was so uncompromising, criticizing [Neville Chamberlain](#)'s appeasement of Germany, went whole-hog in his appeasing Russia during the Second World War.

This is only part of my talk. That relationship of Churchill and Stalin in the Second World War would require a still unwritten enormous book, which I shall not do.

The other thing which I will try to point out at the end of this lecture, which runs through 40 years of Churchill's career, is that, the very different attitudes he had toward Russia notwithstanding, there is an amazing consistency in his view of Russia—Tsarist Russia, Soviet Russia, Stalin's Russia—during 40 years.

About the first, which, of course, is of central importance, though I will only devote relatively small time to it—Churchill and Stalin, and this not unreasonable notion that he was appeasing Stalin, perhaps even more than Chamberlain was appeasing Hitler—I am reminded of a favorite story.

At my age, you have favorite stories and you repeat them. The trouble is that history does not repeat itself, but historians repeat themselves. You have to forgive me for that.

This is the old Irish biddy, to whom the neighbors came for a coffee klatch and said, "Is this story true about the young widow up the street?"

She said, "It's not true, but it's true enough."

I used this in my classes and told them that the historian has to proceed with the reverse of this. There are a lot of things in history that are true, but they are not true enough.

There are eight chapters in Churchill's relationship to Russia. The first phase is before 1917, before the [Russian Revolution](#). Unlike some Englishmen, beginning in 1907, Churchill, even as the First Lord of the Admiralty, was not very much interested in Russia.

He was interested in Europe very much. He was far more European-minded than almost the rest of the British establishment at that time. He pumped very strongly for a military arrangement with France, long before 1914, but not with Russia.

However, there is a very important Russian element, which very few people have recognized, although Churchill mentioned it as a throwaway remark during the ill-fated Dardanelles invasion.

He thought that one of the elements, one of the reasons, why the failure of the Dardanelles invasion and the consequent capture of Constantinople was a disaster was that it would have opened a lifeline to the support of Russia.

He went so far as, just in one half paragraph of his history of the First World War, mentioning that, who knows, it may have even had an effect on Russian internal history, because, as some of you know, the Russian government, the Tsarist government, 1915, 1916, 1917, was in a way divided between a Francophile tendency and a Germanophile tendency.

There's no question that one of the elements that led, not to the first Russian Revolution, but to the [November](#)

[Revolution](#), was the Russian people's profound disagreement and disappointment with their Western allies.

Churchill claimed—and this is a very small element—that the failure of the Dardanelles invasion was not only strategic, but had political consequences.

Now, this is the first, very short chapter. Then comes the Russian Revolution and, of course, Churchill changes.

As you know, beginning in 1918, he insisted on British and French intervention in the [Russian Civil War](#), long after the American [Wilson](#) and the French [Clemenceau](#) gave up the support of the [Russian Whites](#) in the civil war, which, as you know, lasted four years—in a way, almost five years, until 1922.

Again, he was different from the others, because their interest in supporting a Russian non-Communist government faded after the German defeat in 1918. They were mostly worried, with every reason, about the government taking Russia out of the war. This was a deadly danger because the Germans could throw all their forces on the [Western Front](#), which, to some extent, indeed happened.

Once the Germans were defeated, in 1918, not only because of the terrible bloodletting and the wear and tear of the First World War, Clemenceau, even [Lloyd George](#), and, of course, Wilson—Wilson was the slowest about this, but he was constantly misinformed, as American presidents usually are—but Churchill recognized that if the Communists won in Russia, this was going to be a very great danger for European civilization.

Because of this, he pushed very strongly for a continued British intervention in Russia, which, as a matter of fact, militarily, was more effective than both the French and the American ones.

But he lost. His then-great friend and ally Lloyd George did not agree with him. So this is what superficially could be seen as Churchill's antiCommunist period. You will see that his not only distrust, but guttural dislike of Communism existed until the very end.

Now comes the third phase, the 1930s, when, as you know, Churchill, alone in England, saw the German danger, as early as 1933-34. Beginning in 1934, no matter who rules Russia, he is pushing for an Anglo-French-Russian alliance. That did not come about.

There are two interesting things. One is, again, positive, showing Churchill's tremendous insight into people. The other is negative, saying historically where Churchill was wrong.

The positive thing we can see in some of his correspondence and some statements here and there that as early as 1937 he saw that Stalin was not really a Communist revolutionary.

He had a very quick mind and he begins to see this difference between [Trotsky](#), whom he regarded as a ridiculous, third-rate figure. You know that the Trotskyites are the people who want international revolution and Stalin is some kind of a "peasant Tsar" running Russia. He saw this as early as 1937.

Nick, you probably know this. You will be interested that his disdain of [Trotskyism](#) was such that as late as 1944, when he intervenes in the [Greek Civil War](#), he calls on two occasions the Greek Communists Trotskyites. He said, "Stalin wouldn't do a thing like that. This is a crazy Trotskyite thing."

So his insight into Stalin occurs as early as 1936-37.

The negative thing is, in this third phase, Churchill believed, wrongly, that with a little more push, a little more generosity, a little more willingness to compromise, Russia could have been gotten into the Anglo-French alliance between the [Munich Agreement](#) in 1938 and as late as 1939.

He was wrong about this. We know this historically. It's interesting that he stuck to his guns. He began to write his immortal history of the Second World War in 1946-47. In the first volume, published in 1948, he still insists that Russia probably would have come into the war only if the Western Allies had gone to war with Germany at the time of the Munich Agreement. We know now that this is not true.

Incidentally, it goes further than that. You see that there is enough evidence to say that as early as 1935, when there was the [Popular Front](#) and all this, Stalin realized that he would do better to seek an agreement with Germany, with Hitler, than with the British and the French. But that does not strictly belong to my topic.

The fourth phase comes when Stalin makes the [pact](#) with Hitler, 1939-41. Oddly enough—or perhaps not so oddly—the person who was least shocked by that was Churchill. Churchill was then brought into the British government.

I only have a few quotes here. It was shortly after the treacherous Soviet invasion of Poland—Stalin being an ally of Hitler, which, of course, was despicable—Churchill said the famous words, "Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside of an enigma." He said, "But there may be a key to this: Russian national interest."

Russian national interest has nothing to do with Communism. He realized this as early as 1939, that it was Russia's national interest that made Stalin so brutally move into eastern Poland and then into the Baltic states and so forth.

An element of this: He knew that Stalin thought he could make a better deal with Hitler than with the British and the French, but he saw him as a cruel, canny national leader, not the head of international Communism or the "[Evil Empire](#)" or anything like that.

A great proof of this is the letter he wrote to Stalin on the 25th of June 1940, immediately after the collapse of France. This is one of the great state papers of the 20th century.

He said—I'm trying to paraphrase—"Look, I don't want you to stick your neck out, but there are only two powers left in Europe, both of us on the edges: we, the British, and you, the Russians. I don't want you to do anything, but when the time comes, let's just exchange some opinions about what's happening."

He knew—this is recorded—that he did not expect Stalin to answer. He did this often, writing letters to potential enemies. He wanted to remind them of something. As the great [Samuel Johnson](#) said 200 years ago—and Churchill would have agreed—"Gentlemen, you don't have to instruct people; just remind them."

Well, he reminded Stalin all right. He knew that Stalin was not going to react. But he did not know what Stalin did. Stalin told [Molotov](#), "Tell about this letter to the Germans. I'm not going to answer it." He by that time was so much afraid that Hitler might turn against him that he wanted to score a point. He says, "Churchill is writing me, but I'm not answering him."

Now comes the fifth phase, April to June 1941. This is the phase about which we know a great deal because of the German invasion of Russia. Again, to some extent, Churchill, who could be very impatient and very impetuous, was not quite right, because he sent indirectly—and so did [Roosevelt](#), in a sense—many messages to Stalin that "the Germans are going to attack you," and so forth. Stalin dismissed these. Stalin could not believe that Hitler would attack him while he was still at war.

This is a complicated story. We don't go into this.

But an interesting thing is that in one of the direct messages to Stalin—he sent it to the British ambassador, [Sir Stafford Cripps](#), which was one of the worst ambassadorial appointments Churchill did. He had usually very good appointments. He didn't understand that just because Cripps was a left-wing socialist, he would be closer to Russia—no. He wrote a letter to Cripps really excoriating him: "Why didn't you take the letter yourself and put it to Molotov?" It cannot be done.

But, you see, he knew what was happening.

Now comes the 22nd of June, about which I wrote a subchapter in one of my books, in London. This is, in a way, Churchill at his best. The night before, he had a conversation with his secretary, [Jock Colville](#), and Colville said, "Won't this be difficult for you if the Germans are going to attack in the next few days? You were against Communism all the time."

He said, "Never mind. If Hitler would invade Hell, I would make a pleasant reference to the Devil in the [House of Commons](#)."

This was typical Churchill.

Then the most wonderful day, which I was able to research, was the 22nd of June. I want to go into detail, because it's so human. They knew that the Germans were going to attack that day or a day later or a day later.

But Churchill had given orders never to wake him up before 8:00, except for a German invasion in England. The news came at 4:00. He was at [Chequers](#). Colville went around, including [Eden](#), telling them the news and woke up Churchill at 8:00.

Churchill said, "All right, we'll have breakfast"—and I have to tell you a little side story about this—"and tell the BBC I'm going to broadcast at 9:00 tonight."

I want to tell you, I wrote a book about June 1941. I said that he took his very sumptuous bath and went down to breakfast. I had one correction of this by his daughter, [Mary Soames](#), who is, I'm very glad to say, a friend of mine. She said, "There's one thing wrong. Papa never went down to breakfast. He always had breakfast in his room."

Anyhow, he started to write his speech—it was one of his great speeches—right after breakfast and continued to work on it until two minutes before 9:00, when the BBC people came and set up the microphones. In between, he

had a big lunch with people; in between, he had a big dinner with people, with a lot to eat and a lot to drink.

He excoriated [Charles Cripps](#). He said, "Cripps, you are here. Now you're going to go back to Russia. But you must understand, Communists are the lowest kind of human beings I can imagine."

But then he said in his speech, "No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last 25 years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it. But all of this fades away before this spectacle"—innocent Russians slaughtered, Russia invaded by Germany.

This was not just for public consumption. We have the records of the dinner. He had a grand time during dinner. He constantly needled Cripps about Communists and Communism: "They don't matter. You have the wrong idea," and all that. So his private convictions on the 22nd of June 1941 were identical, as so often, with his strong public statement, which was one of his finest speeches.

Now we come to the sixth phase, 1941-44, during the war, not quite to the end of the war. This is very difficult for me to sum up, because there is so much there that, as I told you, a large book could be written about this. It's the topic of more than one lecture, believe me. Even five lectures couldn't exhaust the most important things. I only picked a couple of quotes to tell you, to show you his consistency, his realism about Stalin, whom he saw not as an international revolutionary, but as a peasant Tsar, a Caucasian warlord, which he was.

This quote is a very important one. In early February 1942, when the war situation was very bad, in Singapore, in America, in the western Atlantic, he talked to the Polish prime minister in exile in London, [General Sikorski](#), whom he had esteemed. This is in the Polish documents, which, unfortunately, I read in English—I don't know Polish—which to me is very important. Sikorski tells him, "We are now allies with Russia, but we have to be careful. The Russians have designs on Poland. The Russians are social."

Churchill said to Sikorski—I'm quoting from the Polish documents—that his own assessment of Russia did not differ much from his Polish friend. However, he underlined the reasons which made it necessary to make certain agreements with Russia. She was the only country that had fought against the Germans with success. She had destroyed millions of German soldiers.

At present, the aim of the war seemed not so much victory as the death or survival of our allied nations. Should Russia come to an agreement with the Germans, all would be lost. It must not happen. If Russia was victorious, she would decide on her frontiers without consulting Great Britain. Should she lose the war, the agreement would lose all of its importance.

This is a supreme kind of realism. This leads to what, in my opinion, was the most interesting and crucial summit of the war. In August 1942—you must understand that Hitler could have won the war as late as 1942, even after the United States entered. When Churchill flew to Moscow in August 1942—both of his two-person summits, [August 1942](#) in Moscow and [October 1944](#) in Moscow, were more decisive than the [Yalta](#) or [Tehran](#) conferences.

Churchill took the trouble, which was very arduous and wearisome, to fly to Gibraltar, North Africa, Egypt, and Russia to meet Stalin. He brought nothing to Stalin but bad news: There will be no second front. The Germans were nearing Stalingrad. There can be no Anglo-American invasion of Western Europe, not in 1942, not in the foreseeable future. There will be an Anglo-American invasion of North Africa coming. That we can offer; nothing else.

This meeting started out very badly. Stalin excoriated the British. You must understand, at that point, August 1942, the Russians faced something like 280 to 320 German divisions. The British were engaged against five and a half German divisions in North Africa. This is apart from the sea war and the air war.

This meeting, in the beginning, was catastrophic, because Stalin berated Churchill, and Churchill had little to answer. But there was to be a second meeting, with an interruption.

As Churchill went out of the Kremlin anteroom, he said, "This is very bad. This is very bad."

Somebody told him, "Listen, watch out. They can hear every word you say."

He said, "I don't care if they hear every word I say. They're sons of bitches," and so forth.

Then he went back to Stalin and gave as good as he got. He said, "That's all very nice, but we fought alone against the Germans while you were petty pals of Hitler," and so forth. Stalin respected this. This is one interesting thing between Stalin and Hitler. Hitler had a great hatred against anyone who stood up against him. Stalin respected people who stood up against him.

Stalin thawed. Stalin said, "This is a real man." Then they started drinking. Things were getting better. But all I want to say—this has not been covered. A book ought to be written about the August 1942 summit in Moscow. I cannot imagine any other British politician and statesman who would have had that much influence on Stalin, as

he did at that time. A very, very crucial meeting.

Here's what he said. He didn't say "sons of bitches." He said, "We will deal with them. The way they talk, they may be lower on the scale of nature than orangutans. Now translate this into Russian so they can hear it." This impressed Stalin.

Then there was—and, again, Nick will know that this requires an enormous book—the second summit with Stalin, in October 1944, the so-called percentages agreement, into which I cannot go in detail, which made a tremendous amount of sense in the long run, because, among other things, it saved Greece from Communist occupation.

He thoroughly understood what this all meant. This was more important than [Tehran](#) and [Yalta](#). The Russian armies had already occupied Russia and Bulgaria. They were halfway to my native country, Hungary. He pushed a paper ahead of Stalin and said, "Let's divide this. In Romania and Bulgaria, you'll have 90 percent of your influence. In Greece, we will have 90 percent. Yugoslavia, 50/50; Hungary, 50/50." They changed it then to 80/20.

If you look at the political map of Europe a year later, ten years later, 20 years later, 30 years later, this percentage agreement meant more than all of Tehran and Yalta about Europe going together.

This also brings me—but I'm not going to talk about it in detail—to the complicated relationship, a triangle relationship, of Churchill, [Roosevelt](#), and Stalin.

Roosevelt dealt with Churchill deplorably in Tehran and elsewhere. But Roosevelt wanted two things from the Russians, which also made some sense. He wanted Russia to come into the war with Japan and was willing to pay for this. This made a lot of sense. Who knew in 1943, in 1944, in 1945, that the Americans would have anything like the atom bomb?

He also believed, wrongly, that a new worldwide order must be established on the basis of a United Nations which would be far more efficacious and historically important than the [League of Nations](#) had been. For this, he was willing to grant a lot of things to Stalin, although in the long run the importance of this was minimal.

There was another thing between Roosevelt and Churchill that I very briefly will mention. Roosevelt's historic view was that the United States was somehow in the middle between Russia and Britain in the march of history, between Stalin's Communist state and the old "roast-beef" Britain represented by Churchill; that the Russians were perhaps Siberian pioneers that were too far ahead into a uniform democracy of the world—we don't want that—but the United States was in the middle in the march of history between what Stalin tried to achieve and what Churchill stood for.

Churchill saw the very opposite. They never debated this, but we can put this together. Churchill saw that Russia, instead of ahead, was behind. The key to Stalin was not [Marx](#) or Communism or lack of unemployment or collective agriculture. The key to Stalin was someone like [Ivan the Terrible](#). Instead of being ahead in the march of history, ahead of the uncompromising democratization of the world, it was behind.

This is a very important thing. But again, this would be the subject of a different topic.

You see, the essence here is Churchill's hard reality. He understood that, unlike in the First World War, the Western Allies—Britain and America, Canada, Australia—with their tremendous manpower and material resources, would not be able to defeat 80 million Germans without the Russians. He was consistent through his career.

He saw only two alternatives that go beyond the Second World War. Either Germany is going to run all of Europe, or Russia is going to run the eastern half of Europe. And half of Europe is better than none. Either Germany is going to dominate Eastern and Western Europe together, or the Russians are going to dominate Eastern Europe.

Now comes a seventh phase. I'm very close to the end. He did not only know that Russian rule of Eastern Europe probably could not be prevented—it might be mitigated, but not prevented—he also knew that Communism would not last. This is not in his memoirs. There are two very important things that show his amazing foresight.

In November 1944—it's in [General de Gaulle's](#) memoir—he visited General de Gaulle in Paris, a triumphant reentry into Paris. De Gaulle, as was his wont, tried to needle him, move him against the Americans. He wanted closer Anglo-French coordination rather than constant dependence on America.

Among other things, de Gaulle said to Churchill, "Look at the Americans. They are inexperienced. They're letting all Eastern Europe go to the Russians."

Churchill said, "I know. Russia is now like a hungry wolf in the midst of sheep. But after the meal comes the digestion period."

He foresaw as early as November 1944 that Russia will not digest Eastern Europe.

Another amazing story: As early as New Year's Eve 1952—this is before Stalin's death—he told his secretary, Jock Colville, who recorded it in his memoirs, "By the time you reach the biblical age, there will be no Communism in Eastern Europe."

Colville didn't live to be 70, but his biblical age would have been in the 1980s. Churchill foresaw this in 1952, before Stalin's death.

[Bismarck](#) once said that no genius can foresee history; at best, you can foresee five years, and then you can hear the swish of the skirts of angels. In this respect, Churchill looked ahead and was right, 30 years ahead.

He changed his policy toward Russia by 1944. He began to mention the term "Iron Curtain," in a letter to [President Truman](#) as early as May 1945. Then he made the famous [speech](#) in Fulton, Missouri in 1946. He argued that the United States and Britain should take a stronger move against Russia earlier. He was not listened to.

Nor was he listened to in 1950, when he makes a small speech. Again, the phrase is very interesting. He was not a prime minister yet. He was reelected in 1951. He said, "You know, the Russians fear our friendship more than our enmity."

He began to recognize that the best way to correct the division of Europe and to tamp down the Cold War was not to worsen our relationship with Russia, but to improve it.

When he started to speak about this, after Stalin's death, when the Russians actually began to retreat—Yugoslavia, Austria, Finland—[Eisenhower](#) and [Dulles](#) described Churchill as senile. This was the same Eisenhower who, in 1945, when Churchill pushed to go further and further into Germany, rejected Churchill as being too anti-Russian. In 1952, Eisenhower rejects Churchill for being pro-Russian.

The man who was consistent, who was not an ideologue, who knew history, was Churchill rather than a lot of people, including Eisenhower and Dulles, whose treatment of Churchill between 1952 and 1955 was more despicable than Roosevelt's treatment of Churchill in Tehran, and less reasonable.

So what I want to tell you, in sum, is that there is enormous consistency in Churchill's view of Russia, which has two elements. This is my interpretation.

One of the elements is his enormous sense and knowledge of history. The other is that Churchill had an extraordinary understanding of human nature, of the strengths and weaknesses of people who otherwise, historically, rationally, nationally, were very different from him. This is a very strong element of his genius and shows his consistency about things.

Not incidentally, much of the same thing is applicable to George Kennan, about whom I'm going to talk here at your kind invitation next month. A lot of people cannot understand how Kennan, who urged for a strong policy against Russia all through the war and who made the [containment article](#) in 1947, a few years later would argue for trying to seek some arrangement with the Russians.

A lot of people who ought to know better ascribe this to inconsistency, a man going from one extreme to the other. No. They were two very different persons. They never really met, Churchill and Kennan. They were very different in temperament and background, in mental habits. But in both cases, it does not take special pleading to point out, to emphasize, how consistent they had been.

Thank you.

Discussion

MICHAEL MANDELBAUM: First, you made a very strong case for consistency in Churchill's view of Russia. That view, as I understand it, is in a sense eternal Russian nationalism. Russian nationalism is a little problematical, since Russia was a multinational state until 1991. It's still something of a multinational state.

But, still, this sense of Russian national interest, of Russia as an historic actor on the eastern fringe of Europe, Churchill's understanding of Russia as such, his ability to get beyond the smokescreen of ideology and the gobbledygook of Marxism-Leninism, and his understanding of what he could expect from Russia and what he could hope for—what was possible and what was not possible—given that view, his initial keen advocacy of intervention to smother the Bolshevik baby in its cradle seems to me inconsistent.

Why should he care about Bolshevism? As you point out, the Americans cared about keeping Russia in the war, and when the war was over, they more or less lost interest.

Churchill seems to have had an ideological interest, which seems inconsistent with the Churchill you have

described. I'm wondering whether there is some inconsistency there and, in general, why Churchill was so interested in intervention, even when the Great War was over.

That's one question.

The second question has to do with Churchill's missions to Moscow, especially the 1944 mission, where, as you note, the whole issue of the percentages, of the division of Europe, became codified for the first time.

First, in 1942, was Churchill genuinely worried that Russia would leave the war or would act in such a way as to make it possible for Germany to win?

In 1944, leading to what became the infamous Yalta agreement—wrongly infamous, in my view, and I think in yours also—why did he put it on paper?

Churchill understood that there was nothing to be done about evicting the Russians from Central Europe. He also understood that that was artificial and couldn't stand. Why write anything down about it?

JOHN LUKACS: You must understand that, like almost everybody else, in 1917 and thereafter, he had no reason to see that this was traditional Russia all over again.

Don't forget that there was the Russian Army invading Poland and almost carrying Bolshevism into Central Europe. There were Bolshevik experiments in power for a few months in Munich and in Budapest.

So at that time, he believed that this was a very profound change, that this was a new version of traditional Russian nationalism. There's no one I can think of who saw it differently. At that time he believed this was really revolutionary international Communism. Indeed, this is how [Lenin](#) and Trotsky saw it, too.

But you're right. At that time, you cannot see a consistency running through it.

The second question about his summits with Stalin, in August 1942 and October 1944, this is much simpler. He was by that time dependent on the American alliance.

He was convinced that it was not only imprudent but impossible for him and Britain to take steps which were not in accord with the United States.

QUESTION: What about Michael's question, about 1942, about whether there was a serious fear in Churchill's mind about the possibility of the Russians doing another [Brest-Litovsk](#)?

JOHN LUKACS: Yes, he was convinced of that. Before this meeting, all the messages that came from Russia and from Stalin were pretty cold and inimical.

In retrospect, we can see that the fears of a Russian-German agreement were exaggerated. But they existed. They explain a lot about both Churchill's and Roosevelt's policy to deal softly with Stalin in 1942 and 1943.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: What I would like to do is recognize people, but I would like to move chronologically, as I said. So save your questions. After all, John made it easier for us by dividing his lecture into eight chapters.

We can return to the questions that Michael asked. Those are very good ones and probably need further elaboration. But let's go back chronologically.

I would like to ask if there is anybody in the audience who would like to ask a question about the very first of these chapters, which is Churchill's Dardanelles-Gallipoli fiasco and this whole idea of doing an end run on the Central Powers by invading Turkey, capturing Constantinople, and opening the Black Sea to the Allied forces.

It is a very important chapter in Churchill's biography, as you know. A lot of people thought his career was finished as a result of the Gallipoli fiasco.

I think what has happened through the years is that people who know more about his politics and his changes of parties and so on and so forth don't know enough about the actual political and military situation in 1915, have never given him due credit for at least having the right idea, even though it was terribly executed. It is counterfactual history.

We don't know what would have happened if Constantinople had been captured by the British and the French. But I think it is absurd to simply dismiss the whole idea of an eastern sideshow.

Is there anybody who would like to ask Professor Lukacs something on these two questions? Yes?

QUESTION: This actually chronologically precedes that. I'm just curious if Churchill had anything to say about the [Great Game](#) prior to 1914 or 1917. That was a crucial part of British-Russian relationships. It seems that Churchill

would have something to say about it.

JOHN LUKACS: Almost none.

QUESTION: Back to Gallipoli, my question has always been that it appears that there was a hell of a lot of argument between the Royal Navy and their former First Lord, Churchill, on the running of the Dardanelles, the practicality of it. The opportunity to move through early was there, but it wasn't taken advantage of by the Royal Navy. When they finally made their push, the French lost battleships, the British lost ships, et cetera.

What was going on there behind the scenes with Churchill and his inability to get his policies, with an attack up the Dardanelles, et cetera?

JOHN LUKACS: I'm very glad you asked this question, because I have been thinking about this. As you can see, I am a great admirer of Churchill. But, as I told you, he was wrong about Russia entering the alliance with Western powers in the 1930s.

I have come to a conclusion not involving Russia, that perhaps the entire Dardanelles plan was not a good plan. As you know, he did not have full support from [Jack Fisher](#) and all. But that's not the point.

The point is, let us suppose they would have succeeded and captured Constantinople, and obviously would have had some influence in the Balkans. But knowing how the Germans fought only in Italy, in the Second World War, would that have knocked Germany out of the war?

You see, the distance from Constantinople to Berlin is a very long one.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: I think I'm going to stop this discussion, because, although it's very interesting for people who care about the First World War, it's not directly related to our topic tonight, about Russia, unless somebody wants to ask something about 1915 that essentially raises the question, when Churchill is trying to do what he's trying to do through Gallipoli and the Dardanelles, is this just something that is a larger strategic question about how to win the First World War, and Russia is important only because Russia is where it is geographically, or does it really specifically involve Russia?

If somebody wants to ask a question like that, we will entertain it.

QUESTION: My recollection is that in the Second World War, Churchill was often talking about attacking the soft underbelly of Europe and speaking about going up through Greece and into the Balkans. It has always seemed strange to me. In the light of what you have said, I wonder what your take on that is.

JOHN LUKACS: In relation to 1915?

QUESTIONER: In relation to the Second World War and Churchill keeping his idea from 1915 and saying that this is a way to come to the aid of the Russians and also have a role in the division of Eastern Europe.

JOHN LUKACS: That's a very relevant question, but we have to make a geographical distinction. When Churchill spoke of the soft underbelly of Europe, he mostly meant Italy. He wanted to extend the Italian campaign. It did not happen.

The last time he could convince the Americans to do something that the Americans did not want to do was in early 1943, when he said, "Having defeated the Germans and Italians in North Africa, we now have to go into Sicily and Italy, in spite of the coming big invasion of Western Europe."

About this he had his way. He only made very minor efforts to extend the mostly British and the American presence in the Aegean, or into Yugoslavia. This the Americans didn't want. And oddly enough, this even most of the British generals did not want.

So this whole idea that he wanted to have a Balkan invasion—first of all, the Balkans are not such a soft underbelly. By the soft underbelly he meant Italy, and he wished that the Italian campaign could be extended. He pushed this as late as January of 1945, with the hope that maybe the Allies, mostly British, might reach Vienna before the Russians.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: So the follow-up question, John, is, very naturally, whatever one may think of Churchill as a strategist—and I think it's good that you explained that the soft underbelly was, really, in his mind, Italy and the Adriatic and into Vienna, rather than the mountains of northern Greece and Yugoslavia—the question still is, is he pushing for this strategy primarily for military reasons or for political reasons, in the Second World War?

JOHN LUKACS: They cannot be separated.

QUESTION: Two questions, actually. The first one has to do with a point you made in passing, really in response to Michael Mandelbaum's question about concern that the Soviet Union might do another Brest-Litovsk or another Hitler-Stalin pact.

When one looks at the British guarantee of Poland in 1939 retrospectively, one can see that it freed Stalin to sell himself to the highest bidder. The British and the French could only offer war, and the Germans could offer something else. I don't remember whether Churchill had a view on that guarantee.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: There is a very clear answer to this. Both Chamberlain, who was, in a way, more anti-Bolshevik, and Churchill agreed that the guarantee to Poland only involved Germany, not Russia.

QUESTIONER: The second thing has to do with the impact of the First World War on Churchill's thinking—not just that he never gave up on the idea of the Dardanelles, which was an exceedingly difficult operation, given the mind of the British military establishment in 1915 and the lack of training and inter-branch operations, but I always thought that one of the reasons he wanted to go for the soft underbelly of Europe was the memory of the [Battle of the Somme](#) and the Western Front in World War I, and fear that any invasion of France would result in another such bloodletting.

JOHN LUKACS: That's very important. It does not really involve the Nazis. It's very important, because, although he denies this in his memoirs, Churchill was very worried, anxious about the Normandy invasion.

In Tehran, Stalin recognized this. Stalin tweaked at Churchill: "You really don't want that invasion, do you?" Churchill denied this.

Finally, they agreed—and Roosevelt pushed for it—they all agreed that a great invasion of Western Europe was going to come in May 1944. That was agreed upon in Tehran. Churchill was not happy.

Let me go back a little bit. This is a very, very good question.

You see, this is inconsistency. What happens in the 1930s and even after the war, when Churchill says, "Had we really reacted against the Germans when they marched into the Rhineland, had we really gone to war over Munich," he at that time underestimated the strength of the Germans.

Beginning in 1941, he begins to very seriously estimate the strength of the Germans. He hoped and knew that an invasion to bridgeheads could succeed, but he was afraid, as you say, that what might happen was something like a repetition of the horrible carnage of the First World War, and they would bleed themselves to death in northwestern France, and not be able to break out for a long time.

QUESTION: When Russia left the First World War, did he have any policy toward that? Was there anything he thought could be done to keep Russia in the war? Was that something he was particularly concerned about?

JOHN LUKACS: Let me say first that this was the time when not only his prestige, but his political position was the lowest. So whatever he said in 1917, 1918 did not matter. Lloyd George takes him back in the cabinet as colonial secretary, I think, in 1919. So it really does not matter.

He was horrified by the Communist Revolution, as everybody else, the Communists' success in Russia. He also thought, as many people thought, that the Germans were behind it. And there was some evidence for this, because, as you know, the Germans shipped Lenin back to Russia.

So there was this double fear that the new Bolshevik Russia was, to some extent, in cahoots with the Germans, and the second is that they were revolutionaries who, when the chance comes, would spread revolution all over Central and Eastern Europe.

QUESTION: On the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, and the idea of pushing through and capturing Constantinople in 1915, when the plan was conceived, did Churchill have in mind that if the plan was successful, in some way, Russia would then be involved in the division of the spoils?

JOHN LUKACS: Again, a very interesting question. Two parts. What I'm going to say is not relevant to Churchill. The only thing relevant to Churchill is a couple of letters in this throwaway thing in a paragraph in his history of the First World War. He really hoped that one—only one—positive result of a success in the Dardanelles was that it would strengthen the pro-Allied inclinations within the Russian government.

But more important is, now Churchill is out of the government. Churchill volunteers to be an officer in the army, in France in 1916. His influence is nil. But it's interesting that, reluctantly, following the French, the British in 1916 and the French were in such a disastrous situation that they were willing to hand over a lot of Eastern Europe to Russia, including Constantinople. The irony of history: Fortunately, Lenin and the Russian Revolution relieved them of these obligations.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: We are going to skip over lightly the [Paris Peace Conference](#) and move to the late 1930s, which I know everybody wants to get to, and the Second World War. I know that a lot of people want to ask questions.

In early 1919, he is in Paris briefly for a visit. He is not a very important player in the British delegation. He runs into [Harold Nicolson](#)—the inimitable Harold Nicholson, of course, keeping a diary—in the quarter of the Hotel Majestic. This is from Nicholson's diary, January 24, 1919:

"Meet Winston Churchill in the hotel passage. 'Hello,' I say to him. 'Have you come over to hurry us up?'" Things are very slow at the Paris Peace Conference.

"'No,' Churchill answers. 'I have come to get myself an army'"—to get involved in the Russian Civil War.

So let us move forward a little bit.

QUESTION: I understood you to say that on Churchill's first visit during World War II, he agreed with Stalin that Russia would have Eastern Europe and England would keep Greece. Did Roosevelt have any choice when they went to Tehran? Wasn't it all decided?

JOHN LUKACS: No, no, no, no, madam. This agreement was not made until October 1944, a year after Tehran. They did not speak at all about Eastern Europe in August 1942. The important thing was, oddly, that some kind of human relationship was established.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: Between Stalin and Churchill.

JOHN LUKACS: Yes.

QUESTION: Since Nick mentioned the human relationship between Churchill and Stalin, I want to ask a question about that.

But I just want to very briefly make a comment in passing, which you touched on in your talk, that I think bears emphasizing, which is just what a degree of foresight Churchill had in pushing for military intervention to strangle the Bolshevik baby in its crib.

This was really, I think, one of the great missed opportunities of the 20th century, one of the real turning points of the 20th century, because I think the Russian Civil War could have easily gone one way or the other.

The Bolsheviks were actually pretty weak in the beginning, and if the Allies had actually made the kind of major intervention that Churchill had advocated, they could have destroyed the Bolsheviks, thereby, perhaps, preventing not only the rise of Communist Russia, but also Nazi Germany, preventing World War II, preventing the rise of the Chinese Communists. The list of what-ifs goes on and on and on.

Obviously, it's all speculation, but I do think that this was one of those great moments, very similar to if Churchill had been listened to in the 1930s about the dangers of Hitler. He was ignored then, of course, famously, but more obscurely ignored about the dangers of Communism in the late teens and early 1920s. And we paid a huge price for that.

But getting back to the issue of Stalin and Churchill, I want to take issue a little bit with your notion that Churchill was a font of consistency in his approach to the Russians and Uncle Joe.

I didn't realize that we were going to be talking about Churchill and Russia. If so, I would have happily brought the quotes, which I'm sure you are familiar with, with the ecstatic reactions that Churchill delivered about Stalin, coming back from his meetings with Stalin and not only telling in public, but also telling his cabinet colleagues what a trustworthy gentleman Stalin was and how he got along famously with him and how he was beginning to warm to him, and he thought Stalin warmed to him, and how they could make a deal on the future of Europe and you could take his word, and on and on and on.

There was much criticism of FDR for being overly trusting of Stalin and being gulled by him. But Churchill, it seems to me, at moments in the war, and as a result of his summit conferencing, was equally gulled and equally impressed by Stalin, beyond what I would suggest a dispassionate reading of Stalin's motivations would warrant.

I would be curious for your comment on that.

JOHN LUKACS: You have a very large question. The first part I can't answer. Historians should not deal with what-if. But in every event in our personal life, there is a potentiality within the actuality.

Lenin was close to losing the civil war. Had, with British support or without British support, the Russian Whites won the civil war, there would have been no independent Estonia, no independent Latvia, no independent

Lithuania, no independent Finland, no Eastern Poland.

Oddly enough—God writes straight with crooked lines—the independence of Eastern Europe was made possible because of the stupid Russian Revolution.

On the second: God have mercy on their souls, for 50 years I was upset with [Bill Buckley](#) and [James Burnham](#) and the entire so-called conservative movement, who said that in 1917 history changed gears. History is not an automobile. The tragic events of the 20th century were the two world wars, not the Russian Revolution.

The Russian Revolution was a consequence of the First World War. The Russian Revolution in the long run did not cause any harm compared to what the two world wars did.

The First World War, the Second World War, and the entire Cold War had nothing to do with Communism. It was a result of the Second World War.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: What about his question about Churchill and Stalin?

QUESTIONER: My real question was about Churchill and Stalin, but since we are going down a tangent, I can't resist.

I just find it hard to see how you can justify that viewpoint, given that when you look at just the sheer number of people that Stalin, for example, killed, independent of World War II, and then when you look at the critical support that Stalin gave to the rise of [Mao](#) and the Communists in China, who may well not have been able to take over without Russian assistance, and when one thinks about the untold human tragedy of Maoist rule in China, that seems to me, even independently of everything else—and the role that Russia also played, I think, in fostering the rise of Nazi Germany—it's hard to get around 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution as being truly a critical turning point, which I think Churchill saw, to his credit, more than anybody else.

JOHN LUKACS: Sir, let's not deal in numbers. You could say that in 1570 Ivan the Terrible killed more Russians than Francis III killed Frenchmen. What difference does it make?

The greatest danger to Western civilization was Hitler's Germany and not Stalin's Russia. Stalin may have killed more people than Hitler killed, but don't forget, Stalin had an ancestor, Ivan the Terrible. Hitler had none.

Hitler was a new force in history. Hitler was the man who alone started the Second World War. There are still historical seminars, people discussing who was responsible for the First World War. Austria, Serbia, France, prime ministers, kaisers, admirals? Hitler started the Second World War alone and almost won it.

There were 80 million Germans whom he united, largely. Against them were 500 million people of the Russian and the British and the American empires, and it took six years to defeat them. Any one of them could not do it. Two of them together could not do it. It took all three. Some of the Germans fought for another week even after Hitler killed himself. This is no joke.

QUESTION: Roosevelt has often been accused of being soft on Stalin or having been gullible, to a certain degree. You say there is evidence to suggest that Churchill committed the same sin—or at least what he said to his friends and what he wrote in letters suggests some of the same. You say, how do we explain that? Right?

JOHN LUKACS: Churchill would make statements that sound kind of odd in retrospect. But gullible he was not.

QUESTION: I would love a little more explanation of why—you say he wasn't gullible. Again, I wish I had the quotes in front of me. But if you read them, he really had glowing tributes to many of Stalin's wonderful qualities after meeting him.

He was the guy who invented the term "summit," as you know, for high-level conferences. But I think he really displayed one of the dangers of summitry, which is that you get very taken with your interlocutor and you lose greater perspective.

QUESTION: These charges of gullibility are what enter the political arena. But in retrospect, I think it is fair to argue that Roosevelt overestimated the degree to which he could sway Stalin, the degree to which he could exert some influence.

So I wonder whether that was true of Churchill as well, because in the end, on the essentials, the Western Allies basically had no impact on Stalin in the postwar settlement. There was no postwar settlement à la 1919. The line of division in Europe was drawn where the armies reached.

Did Churchill understand that this would be so or did he have other expectations that were not borne out?

PARTICIPANT: I think one of the fundamental things about Churchill in World War II was, first, he was

consistent about, if Hitler invaded Hell, he would have some kind words to say about Satan. But also I think he recognized progressively, as the war went on—and even from the very beginning—the strategic weakness of Britain in the alliance.

As the Americans got their act together, they became increasingly stronger and his position weaker. He understood that the only way to stop a Russian advance, as long as the Russians stayed in the war, was by making the armies of the Western Allies meet the Russian armies further east. Unless they could do that, there was going to be no persuasion.

I don't know what the quotes are; I don't remember them. But I'm not persuaded that Churchill was the least bit gullible about this.

QUESTION: By coincidence, last week my wife and I had dinner in Madison, Wisconsin with [Milan Hauner](#), the Czech-American historian, who is editing the diaries and memoirs of Edvard Beneš, who in London was heading the Czech government in exile.

He told me something that bears very much on what we are talking about. In 1942, there was an active peace feeler through [Ambassador Kollontai](#), a remarkable woman in Sweden.

The British were aware of this and the Czechs were aware of this, and Stalin was making active probes for a possible wartime settlement. This may have affected much of what went on, even though, according to Hauner, a lot of the details of this still remain secret.

JOHN LUKACS: I know about this. Stalin's role was not that decisive, but Stalin allowed to probe things through Kollontai, hoping that this would have an effect on the British and the Americans. It was a kind of slight thing of diplomatic blackmail. It didn't go very far.

I can tell you two statements of Stalin which really, in a way, showed a difference between Churchill and Roosevelt, and Churchill and the so-called—I'm a conservative, but not like the present conservatives.

Shortly after [Pearl Harbor](#), Eden went to Moscow to talk to Stalin. It was a situation where the Germans had been stopped before Moscow, but they could still hear gunfire. The front was 20 miles to the west of Moscow. Stalin makes two statements that, to me, are very telling.

The first thing is that Roosevelt and Churchill had the Atlantic Charter, four freedoms and so forth, and they wanted Roosevelt to sign it. Stalin said, "It is time now. What are we going to do with the Baltic states in eastern Poland?"

Churchill and Eden said, "We cannot do this. We have to draw declarations."

Stalin said, "A declaration to me is algebra. I'm interested in arithmetic. Who gets what?" which is very typical, not only of 1941, but 1945 and, of course, the percentages agreement.

Here is the other thing, between Stalin and Hitler. Please understand that you are burdened with my presence here because I left Hungary in 1946, not because of Communism, but because the Russians were there and I knew they were going to impose Communism—not because there was great Communist strength in Hungary.

But because of this, I want to tell you, there is a great difference between Stalin and Hitler.

During the same conversation, they talked about Hitler, who, incidentally, Stalin greatly admired. He said some nice things about Hitler as late as 1944. But it's another story.

Stalin said, "The trouble with Hitler is, he doesn't know when to stop."

Eden said, "Does anyone?"

Stalin said, "I do."

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: Let's agree that Churchill was not gullible. I think that may be a red herring of a word. Still, he says some things about Stalin that shock us or jolt us or make us wonder.

Are we simply saying, therefore, that it's a situation in which Churchill appreciates certain qualities of strength, of perseverance, of clarity of thinking in Stalin, without necessarily liking him as a person or thinking that he is trustworthy? You can't do the one without the other.

I think this is what Max is trying to get you to tell us, what you think really was going on in the Churchill-Stalin relationship, as it developed, beginning with their first meeting in August 1942, and how it affected relations between Britain and Russia for the rest of the war, as we get to the point where we know Germany is going to be

defeated.

JOHN LUKACS: I do think there is no question that there was a certain element of respect that Churchill had for Stalin and, oddly enough, that Stalin had for Churchill. It was not the dominant thing, but that existed.

I can tell you an example. You know about the Katyn murders, with Stalin's tacit approval, in 1940, of probably more than 13,000 Polish officers. Churchill's ambassador to the Polish exiled government in London was a man called Owen O'Malley, whom I knew and who was also close to Churchill, because back in the 1920s he helped Churchill write his books.

O'Malley told Churchill that he was convinced that Katyn was done by the Russians and not by the Germans. The Russians tried to explain that the Germans did it.

Churchill said, "I know this, but I cannot bring this up."

QUESTION: I have read reports about what happened in Tehran between Roosevelt and Churchill. I have heard Mrs. Mary Soames speak about her father's reaction to that, how devastated he was. It caused him a great deal of pain. I never really understood why Roosevelt behaved that way.

JOHN LUKACS: There are two elements. One is personal. Roosevelt did believe that he could charm Stalin, to some extent. But he also believed, in a more practical way, that at this point America's good relationship with Russia was far more important than its relationship with Britain.

That's why he goes to Tehran and decides to live in the Russian embassy. The British lived in the British embassy. There was an American embassy, small. They could have lived somewhere else.

All through Tehran, he tweaks Churchill; he makes jokes about Churchill. He tells Stalin, "Doesn't he talk too long?" and so forth.

There is a little foretaste of this. On the way to Tehran, Churchill stopped in Cairo and wanted to talk to Roosevelt. Roosevelt wanted to do everything to avoid Stalin knowing that America and Britain, Churchill and Roosevelt, are in cahoots. Harry Hopkins, who was very smart, said to Churchill in Tehran, "You will hear things in Tehran. You will see the president's attitude in Tehran. You won't be happy about it."

QUESTIONER: It was contrived, then, in order to camouflage the cahoots, or whatever you were describing? So it was not sincere?

JOHN LUKACS: Churchill was so much aware of the British dependence on the United States that in the last volume of his war history, he underplayed this.

Churchill's daughter told me that one thing was very typical of Churchill. She said, "Papa told us children once, 'Never tell anyone I told you so.'"

In his last volume, Churchill would have had ample memoranda, papers, arguments to say, "You see, dealing with the Russians, I was right and Roosevelt was wrong."

He did not do this. He did not even criticize Eisenhower. He wrote a letter to Eisenhower when Eisenhower was running for president. He said, "My book is appearing now, just about the time of your inauguration. You will see that I underemphasized the differences we had in the last year of the war." Was Eisenhower grateful? Not in the least.

QUESTION: Obviously, we could have a whole session devoted to Churchill's relations with and attitudes towards the United States. One could ask about Churchill whether he maintained the same cheerful attitude toward the United States, despite all the differences he had, for reasons of realpolitik.

In other words, whether there was some dim parallel between his attitude and his public statements about Russia and about the United States.

Just parenthetically on that point, my colleague [John Harper](#) wrote a book called [American Visions of Europe](#), in which he argued, in partial exculpation of Roosevelt, that insofar as Roosevelt thought systematically about postwar Europe at all—and he didn't think systematically about much of anything—his one basic assumption was that the United States would not be involved in Europe after the war, and therefore the Soviet Union would have a dominant position, and therefore everything flowed from that.

That's also controversial. But that's by way of partial defense of FDR.

Feel free to comment on that, John, but I wanted to ask another question, beginning with the American policy toward the Soviet Union, toward Europe, and on the great failure to push farther east when at least some people,

not least [Patton](#)—of course, Patton had his own agenda—assumed that this could have been done.

Of course, the Czechs have always believed that it would have been easy to get to Prague.

David Eisenhower wrote a long book, which you probably know, in defense of his grandfather, arguing that Eisenhower's reticence—and he admitted that Eisenhower was not as bold militarily as he might have been in the first five months of 1945—that that was explained by the fact that American grand strategy was depending on a Soviet declaration of war against Japan.

Eisenhower certainly didn't know anything about the bomb. Indeed, until April of 1945, it wasn't clear that it would work.

So my question is, did Churchill share any of this sentiment? Was Churchill concerned about the Far East to anything like the degree the Americans were? Did he put any value on jollyng the Russians along so as to maximize the chances that they would declare war against Japan? Or did he not care about that at all?

JOHN LUKACS: He hardly cared about that. But what he cared about was the excessive—and in this respect, Roosevelt and the State Department were in complete harmony—the excessive American expectation of the Soviet Union joining the United Nations. Churchill knew that, all right, it was a good idea, but it didn't matter very much.

Let me tell you something else that you probably do not know. [Harriman](#) said this late in his life, and it is true. Stalin had great respect for Roosevelt. This relationship worked, partly because of the might of the United States.

There are several statements Stalin makes about the United States during the war that are very positive—mostly what America is capable of producing, airplanes and tanks and so forth. He was in awe of Roosevelt.

He reacted even more strongly to the news of Roosevelt's death than Churchill did.

Harriman says, what would have happened had Roosevelt lived? Of course, it's impossible. He was very ill. Could the Russian subjugation of Eastern Europe have been avoided with Roosevelt being—it's a what-if question.

I say that perhaps, to some extent, Roosevelt could have produced some compromises from Stalin, but not much.

QUESTIONER: This is a question that goes back a little way, so I'm asking it in the wrong order. It's really more biographical about Churchill.

In 1941, I think it's fair to say—correct me if I'm wrong, John—that Soviet military capabilities were not all that highly rated. They certainly were not highly rated by Hitler. He dramatically underestimated the Russians. But there were reasons to think that they wouldn't put up much of a fight

JOHN LUKACS: Everybody thought that.

QUESTIONER: And it wasn't unreasonable, considering what had happened and their performance in Finland.

My question is, what was Churchill's estimate? In a sense, it didn't matter, because that was what he had. That was the only ally he had. He had to hope for the best.

Did he share the underestimation or did he have a clearer sense of what the Russians were capable of?

JOHN LUKACS: Churchill was, of course, very relieved that Hitler attacked Russia. By that time, we had a joint chief of staff, the Americans and British. The estimate was that Hitler was going to conquer Russia in three to six months.

I'll tell you a very interesting thing about Hitler, who was not stupid. The German generals, who were the best generals of the war, without exception, thought that the Germans would go through Russia like a knife through butter.

Twenty-four hours before the German invasion of Russia, Hitler tells [Goebbels](#), "You know, entering a new war is kicking a door open with a dark room behind. Nobody knows what's behind it."

QUESTION: Actually, just a little historical fact, because my area of expertise is Asia, not Europe. There was one country that did know the military capability of the Russians, and that was the Japanese.

The Japanese toyed with the idea that, instead of attacking us, they would attack Russia. They had a battle—I forget exactly where it was, off the top of my head—and the Russians cleaned their clocks.

JOHN LUKACS: I know, yes.

QUESTIONER: And they said, "Uh-uh. We'll try the Americans, because we consider them to be soft." Also we thought we would fight naval battles with battleships, but the Japanese did us a favor by sinking all the battleships, so we had to fight the war with aircraft carriers, which is the way they fought it.

But the question I have for you is—and this just shows my ignorance—I had been led to believe that at Munich or soon after Munich, when Britain, France, and certainly we were in no mood for a war, the one country that said, "Let's go after them now," was the Soviet Union.

JOHN LUKACS: No.

QUESTIONER: No? Okay.

QUESTION: In the dark days of 1941, as you were alluding to, the British sent signals, as did the Americans, that we had information that there was going to be an [Operation Barbarossa](#); there was going to be an attack.

No one is really quite sure where that information came from. But the Russians discounted it because they had information, or thought they did, that Churchill was looking towards a separate peace along the Lord Halifax plan. These conversations were going on, which supposedly led to the flight of [Rudolf Hess](#), who was tricked into believing it, on a peace mission.

What are the true facts in these dark hours between Russia and Great Britain?

JOHN LUKACS: This is easy. It's not quite like this. Stalin believed, and with every reason, that it was in Churchill's interest to provoke a war between Germany and Russia. He did not think—even the Hess episode didn't have much effect on him.

But he believed that it was not in Hitler's interest—Hitler was still fighting England—it was not in Hitler's interest to start a two-front war; it was in Churchill's interest.

So until the 22nd of June 1941, and indeed for some weeks afterwards, he trusted Hitler more than he trusted Churchill.

QUESTION: At the [Casablanca Conference](#), Roosevelt out of the blue came up with the concept of "unconditional surrender." It seemed to almost be a whim.

Churchill was apparently quite taken aback by it. Do we have evidence as to how Stalin may have felt about it? What did it do insofar as—did it prolong the war, because there was no possibility of an internal German coup?

JOHN LUKACS: There is an awful lot of literature in Germany, and this includes a statement by [Pope Pius XII](#)'s secretary, who was a German nun, [Sister Pascalina](#)—very intelligent. They called her La Popessa.

There is a document in which she says unconditional surrender prolonged the war. It's not true. "Unconditional surrender" is a phrase. In the Italians' surrender there were a lot of conditions. In the Japanese surrender, we very wisely kept the emperor.

"Unconditional surrender" is a phrase. Unconditional surrender or not, the Germans would have fought to the very end.

QUESTION: There was just a question which the gentleman over here asked about—and I should know the answer, but I don't know the answer—what exactly was the source for information about the invasion of Russia before it happened?

JOHN LUKACS: That's very easy. There were 175 German divisions in Poland, in a flat country. You cannot disguise this.

QUESTION: The question is why Stalin didn't believe all the evidence that he had.

QUESTION: Was Roosevelt physically even competent at his last meeting with Stalin?

JOHN LUKACS: He was very weak. He wanted what Stalin once called "algebra." Stalin was interested in arithmetic—this is mine, this is yours.

NICHOLAS RIZOPOULOS: Thank you very, very much.

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