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Seeking Comradeship in the “Ogre’s Den:” Winston Churchill’s Quest for a Warrior Alliance and his Mission to Stalin, August 1942

On 12 August 1942, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill arrived in Moscow to meet Soviet leader Josef Stalin, for the first time, a mission that Churchill’s wife, Clementine, had described to him as a “visit to the Ogre in his Den.”¹ Churchill had, by his own account, attempted to strangle the Bolshevik state at birth, by supporting British intervention on the side of the White Russian counter-revolutionaries in 1918-19. His arrival in Moscow was a dramatic illustration of the way the actions of Adolf Hitler had altered international politics. However, in histories of the coalition of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union that came together to defeat Hitler, this mission of Churchill plays a small and insignificant part.² Indeed it is often barely mentioned, though for its historic symbolism, one might rank Churchill’s meeting with Stalin as on a par with U.S. President Richard Nixon’s meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1972. It will be shown here that Churchill’s mission should not be dismissed so lightly when examining the early development of that strange coalition commonly called the “Big Three.” Churchill’s meetings with Stalin established, despite great setbacks in the middle period of the mission, that this alliance could function as a viable entity, so long as all

parties agreed tacitly to certain rules of engagement. It is often suggested that the third member of the Big Three, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, was largely responsible for establishing this pragmatic approach, but this article will show that Churchill and Stalin became alive to the wisdom of managing their interactions in this manner independently of Roosevelt, and indeed some way in advance of his active involvement in Big Three politics.

More attention has been paid to Churchill's second visit to Moscow, in October 1944, in which he made his infamous suggestion regarding "percentages" of influence in Eastern Europe, than to his first visit to Moscow (code-named BRACELET) two years earlier.³ The personal interactions between Churchill and Stalin have always had a problematic place in the traditional, but enduring, narrative of Churchill's wartime views of the USSR, and of Churchill himself as war-leader. The prominent theme of that narrative, established by Churchill himself, was his "eyes-open" attitude: open to wartime co-operation, but without letting delusions about the USSR or Stalin get in the way, and always aware of Stalin's designs on Eastern Europe. BRACELET does not obviously fit the customary themes of discourse on Churchill, for it neither held a strong message as to Churchill's far-sightedness regarding a Soviet threat, nor did it involve the issues appealing to those whose interest in Second World War diplomacy is shaped by their search for the origins of the Cold War. However, a fresh look at the motivations of Churchill in making the trip and what took place in Moscow is well worthwhile in order to enhance our understanding of wartime diplomacy, for it sheds light on the developing pattern of the wartime "Grand Alliance" at a time when there was much still to be settled as to how it would be conducted.

Historians who have devoted serious attention to Churchill's attitudes have preferred not to present them in quite so stark a form as the narrative described above,

even though it remains potent in accounts of Churchill for a general readership. What tends to divide such historians is the degree to which they find consistency in Churchill's views and attitudes. There are those such as David Carlton and John Charmley, who, from different perspectives, find Churchill essentially continuing to be influenced by his long-standing views of Bolshevism.⁴ Conversely, David Reynolds, Robin Edmonds and Martin Kitchen find Churchill more inconsistent with his past, though wavering between that view and one that was more inclined to see co-operation with the Soviets as a realistic possibility.⁵ Churchill's doctor Sir Charles Wilson (later Lord Moran) recorded Churchill's desire to work with Stalin, as well as his doubts about the Soviet leader. Wilson put Churchill's inconsistency down to fluctuations in his health.⁶ Churchill's attitudes were certainly neither straightforward, nor consistent, but were more the result of conflicting elements in his attitudes to communism (domestic and Soviet), to the USSR and to Stalin, magnified by, but not entirely created by, the conditions of co-belligerency. Examination of Churchill's first contacts with Stalin in person demonstrate that though his attitudes to Bolshevism were immutable, his attitudes to *Stalin* were not. Appreciation of the degree to which Stalin moved away from being simply a personification for Churchill of Bolshevism's worst excesses is central to understanding the paradoxical nature of his attitudes as they developed in the period of the alliance, 1941-45. In engaging with Stalin as a (fellow) warlord, Churchill was able to reconcile his conflicting impulses, simultaneously to embrace the Soviets as powerful and significant partners in his self-defined mission to crush Hitler, and to recoil from them out of suspicion about their methods, their past and their objectives.

To an extent, Churchill operated on the basis of a specific conceptualisation of both his great allies. He constructed an image of Franklin Roosevelt that only partly reflected the reality of that complex individual (and contained a certain element of

romanticisation and wishful thinking).⁷ Roosevelt became the personification to Churchill of the America that Britain needed it to be, and there are good grounds for arguing that Churchill did the same with regard to Stalin, though with more equivocation. It was more frequent with Stalin than with Roosevelt that the Soviet leader's own behaviour raised conflicting reactions and characterisations—often the difference was between the telegraphic Stalin and the personal Stalin—though the record does show a few private occasions when Churchill showed his awareness that Roosevelt, too, was not conforming to Churchill's preferred image.⁸

In the case of Stalin, Churchill came to alight on an image of him as warrior-leader, and then proceeded to conceive of their relationship as a “comradeship-in-arms” (reflecting his own self-image, too), a term he never used in association with Roosevelt. It was the quest for such a Stalin that took Churchill to Moscow in August 1942. The ostensible reason, and the one always reported by historians, was to convey the news that the British and Americans were not intending to open a second front in Western Europe in 1942, but there was no reason why Churchill himself had to take that news personally, and many reasons why he should not do so, including the old dictum about messengers bringing bad news. Neither before nor later was there any reluctance to send Stalin bad news either by telegram or by ambassadorial interview. The actual purpose of Churchill's trip was much more significant, being a matter of the nature and conduct of the wartime alliance as a whole, and the Churchill-Stalin comradeship that would be at the heart of it—if all went well. The mission, and the way that events on it unfolded only really make sense if viewed through this prism.

Churchill's antipathy to Bolshevism as an ideological movement is, of course, well-documented and beyond doubt. It is a matter of more debate, however, as to how far that hostility was always replicated in his attitude to the USSR as a state. Certainly, for

much of the time, Churchill would not have distinguished between the two: yet there is evidence that at times he did so—that he detected in the Soviet Union in essence the old Russia. In particular, as the threat from Nazi Germany grew during the 1930s, so he saw the possibilities of the USSR playing a more traditional role in the balance of power. This perception was no doubt strengthened by the obvious danger that Hitler posed to the USSR and influenced by the more “civilised” diplomatic behaviour of Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov from 1933 to 1939. Churchill was among the wide circle of opposition and anti-appeasing figures cultivated by the irrepressible Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky.⁹ Thus he was to be found advocating an alliance with the USSR in his newspaper column in 1939, and even after the Soviets cynically shared in the division of Poland with Germany in the autumn of 1939, he publicly stated that there was a good possibility that British and Soviet interests would coincide.¹⁰ It was soon after this that he made his often-quoted remark about Soviet policy being a mystery inside a riddle, wrapped in an enigma.¹¹ What is often overlooked is that at that time, most observers, including leading figures in the British and French Governments, found Soviet policy far from enigmatic—indeed they saw the Soviets as acting clearly and unambiguously in cahoots with the Nazis. Churchill was, by contrast, suggesting that there was a distance between the two, that the Soviets and Nazis were not the same—as many people were saying—and that they could easily realign in a way more favourable to Britain. This did not, however, prevent Churchill vigorously supporting moves in January 1940 to send troops to aid the Finns in their war against the Soviets, in the hopes of cutting German access to Swedish iron ore along the way: Churchill at this time faced the military prospect of war with the Soviets with equanimity, sharing the common view that they were militarily decrepit. Communism, he said publicly at the height of the Finnish-Soviet war, “rots the soul of a nation.”¹²

All this notwithstanding, his attitudes towards the Soviet Union, even if it was the fountainhead of Bolshevism, were clearly changeable according to the developments of international politics, and to this extent it is clear that he regarded the Soviet leadership in a sense as realists. He had, in fact, had no contact with that leadership, with the exception of his informal contacts with Maisky before the war. He had said little about Stalin himself, who simply represented the grim, dark figure at the centre of the Bolshevik menace. This position was to continue during the first year of his premiership. He sent only two messages to Stalin, neither of which received a reply. The first was an appeal to Soviet realism, by setting out the situation resulting from German victories in the West, and inviting Stalin to consider their impact on Soviet interests. It was intended to gain Sir Stafford Cripps, the new ambassador to Moscow, a meeting with Stalin. It achieved this, only to prompt from Stalin comments to Cripps that discouraged any further contacts by apparently aligning himself with those who sought to alter the “old equilibrium” in Europe.¹³

Churchill, however, continued to see Stalin as essentially a realist, and it was as a result of this assumption that his second message was sent, in April 1941. Again it was a short, deliberately matter-of-fact message, in which Churchill, in suitably disguised form, informed Stalin of intelligence that he had gained from Ultra decrypts, pointing to a German military build-up, preparatory to an attack on the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The message was delayed in transmission by Cripps, who was attempting his own, more complicated, demarche at the same time. Churchill was particularly annoyed at Cripps, and later said that relations might have been easier at the start of the Anglo-Soviet relationship had the message been delivered in a timely fashion.¹⁵ When he met Stalin in August 1942, this was still on Churchill’s mind, for he asked Stalin about it. Churchill had made no further attempt to communicate with Stalin, and re-stated his realist interpretation by

commenting to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that it was best to let the Soviets draw their own conclusions from the facts, rather than run after them with “frantic efforts to assure them of your love.”¹⁶

This attitude was generally to continue to characterise Churchill’s attitude towards his new ally for the first twelve months after the German attack on the Soviet Union. When signals intelligence made it clear that Germany was going to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941, there was debate within the British Government as to whether to welcome the USSR as an ally. While there was never any consideration of following the course that some conservative revisionists have suggested would have been wise—of coming to terms with Hitler now he was focused on the Soviets—there was a clear sense at that time that alliance with the Soviets was a matter of choice and was not simply dictated by the force of events.¹⁷ While Eden offered Maisky the despatch of a military mission to Moscow, Churchill assured Roosevelt that there was no question of a close alliance. Eden and the Minister for Information, Alfred Duff Cooper, argued that fifty per cent of British public opinion would be hostile to such an alliance.¹⁸ Churchill, however, in his broadcast to the nation on the evening of the day that Germany attacked the Soviet Union, aligned Britain with the cause of a people he characterised as fighting for their own homes and their country. He referred to his attitudes towards Bolshevism and stood by them, but in resounding words declared them irrelevant, when the Soviets were engaged with Britain’s enemy. He thus from the beginning finessed the problem of divided British opinion (which mostly split on class lines) by calling into being a comradeship-in-arms:

No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word that I have said about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. The past with its crimes, its follies, its tragedies flashes away. I see the Russian soldiers standing on the threshold

of their native land, guarding the fields which their fathers have tilled from time immemorial....

... my mind goes back across the years to the days when the Russian armies were our allies against the same deadly foe; when they fought with so much valour and constancy, and helped to gain a victory from all share in which, alas, they were—through no fault of ours—utterly cut off....

The Russian danger is therefore our danger, and the danger of the United States, just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe....¹⁹

In the next three months, Churchill urged his reluctant military staffs to seek ways of aiding the Soviets, but once it seemed more likely the Soviets would hold out until the winter (meaning there was no chance the Germans could turn back to invade Britain that year), Churchill became more reserved in his attitude. He occupied a middle-ground between the attitudes of his military, who resented sending any aid at all, and Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Supply, who was fired with enthusiasm for the Soviet cause. As the Soviets survived, though retreating back towards Moscow, the particular boundaries to Churchill's readiness to embrace the Soviets as comrades became clear. He had already begun attempting to "woo" Stalin by telegram, as he had courted Roosevelt by telegram and telephone the previous year, but the result was what Eden's left-inclining private secretary, Oliver Harvey, caustically described as "sentimental and florid" and offering "guff" as a substitute for guns.²⁰ When Stalin made specific requests, Churchill was unforthcoming. Stalin asked that Britain declare war on Finland, Hungary and Romania, which had also attacked the USSR, and, in the absence of British land operations in France, the dispatch of British troops (he asked for twenty to thirty divisions) to the Soviet-German front. Churchill answered Cripps caustically when the ambassador pleaded Stalin's case, arguing that Stalin had nothing with which to reproach Britain when he had let them stand alone in 1940.²¹ Churchill sent Beaverbrook to Moscow to negotiate a supply agreement in October 1941, but despite the line he took

with his own Chiefs of Staff, he warned Beaverbrook not to get carried away with the atmosphere in Moscow and allow Britain to be “bled white.”²² In the weeks following that meeting, Stalin criticised the British for failing to come to Soviet assistance, for failing to declare war on the Axis satellites, and for failing to answer the Soviet request for British troops to serve on the Soviet front.²³ Churchill continued to respond gruffly to Stalin’s demands, and it took some collusion between Maisky and Eden in November 1941 to cool down the atmosphere, by contriving a conciliatory Soviet message to which Churchill in turn felt able to reply in a more moderate fashion than he had originally intended. It is clear, from this little incident, that Churchill’s view of Stalin as an ally could be susceptible to influence by the form and language of Stalin’s communications.²⁴

During one of his discussions with Beaverbrook in October, Stalin had suddenly proposed that there should be an Anglo-Soviet alliance.²⁵ In the absence of any means to give direct military aid, and concerned to bolster the Soviet will to resist, Eden went to Moscow to follow up the alliance suggestion.²⁶ At the same time, Churchill travelled to the United States as a response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and on the British Empire in the East. Stalin demanded of Eden that the British recognise the annexations made by the Soviets during 1939-41 (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Eastern Poland, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and parts of Finnish Karelia). Eden stalled him, but on his return to London argued that these demands should be conceded, in order to assuage Soviet suspicions, keep them fighting until Germany was completely defeated, and to build a post-war alliance to contain Germany.²⁷

Churchill shared the views of his American hosts that such a concession was inadvisable, claiming that what mattered to the Soviets were not political issues but military assistance and supplies of munitions. His lack of interest in working on a relationship with the Soviets, which Cripps found so regrettable and short-sighted, was

built as much on his focus on the United States as it was on his attitude to the Soviets.²⁸ With his hopes now brought to fruition by US entry into the war, this attitude reached its apogee at the very time that Stalin was pressing Eden on the need for closer co-operation and planning, based on agreed political objectives and strategy. Churchill's responses to Eden were bullish: full of the first flush of optimism now that the USA was in the war, he asserted that the Soviets would have vast reconstruction needs after the war and would be faced with an economically strong Anglo-American bloc.²⁹ It was not long before it became evident that such simple assumptions about the solidarity and unanimity of Anglo-American co-operation were premature, and this had a significant impact in modifying Churchill's attitude towards handling the Soviets.

The War Cabinet debated the Soviet frontier demands in February, with Beaverbrook and the Deputy Prime Minister, Labour Party leader Clement Attlee, lining up against each other.³⁰ When he failed to persuade Churchill to make the concession, Beaverbrook resigned.³¹ However, within a month, Churchill had changed his mind. There is no clearly stated and authoritative reason for this *volte-face* in the documentary record. Carlton's view is that Churchill was influenced by the growing pro-Soviet tide in British public opinion, and also that he was now considering the unwelcome prospect that the Soviets, not the Anglo-Americans, would be the principal victors in Europe. Eden was certainly arguing that US involvement in post-war European affairs should not be taken for granted, and that if one posited an Allied victory then one had to face the reality of increased Soviet influence.³² There is no direct evidence, however, that Churchill was thinking along these lines. He is often, indeed, represented as influenced not by apprehension of early Soviet victory, but by a fear they would suffer further catastrophic defeats. However, in March 1942, it was very unclear to British observers what the future held on the Soviet-German front. There were some signs that the Soviet winter counter-

offensive, which had produced prematurely optimistic public statements by Stalin, had run out of momentum, but it was not clear where that would leave the Germans in terms of their ability to launch another massive offensive in the summer. There was thus no reason as yet for the British to consider drastic concessions to try to keep the Soviets in the war.³³

While he had ordered an investigation into the feasibility of an invasion of Western Europe, such as the Soviets were demanding, Churchill had deep reservations about the strategic wisdom of such a move. His first flush of enthusiasm for his new American allies had also been diminished by their evident optimism about the possibilities of such an operation during 1942. It may well have been that these factors brought him to the conclusion to which Eden had come earlier, namely that political concessions were a preferable alternative to military operations that he thought would be a disaster. Whether he believed a separate peace between the Soviets and Germans to be a possibility at this time is uncertain: more likely is that he shared the feeling of the Foreign Office (FO) and of Beaverbrook that Soviet morale was weak, even at the top. An Anglo-Soviet alliance would not, as FO Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Alexander Cadogan said, prevent Stalin doing a “double-cross” if he wanted to, but it might relieve some of his evident suspicions that the British were not committed to Soviet victory.³⁴ It might also ensure that if the Soviets were able to resume their advance, then they would not halt at their own frontiers, or resort to isolationism in the post-war period, leaving Britain to deal with a still-powerful Germany alone.³⁵ Oliver Harvey and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Alan Brooke, both noted at the start of March that Churchill was talking about going to see Stalin, and Brooke mentioned specifically that the purpose was to discuss post-war frontiers.³⁶

A final element might have been pique with the Americans: the State Department had been very dismissive of the FO's views on the frontiers, and were clearly suspicious that British policy still inclined naturally towards appeasement (this time of the Soviets). Even worse, Roosevelt had weighed in with the comment that Stalin distrusted the British, but liked him better, so perhaps things could be settled between the two of them.³⁷ Despite his determination to be the best of friends with Roosevelt, Churchill was not prepared to concede to him the leadership in Allied-Soviet relations, and Roosevelt's attitude may well have strengthened Churchill's readiness to seize the initiative, in order to achieve a closer Anglo-Soviet relationship. Roosevelt's evident intention, not only to forge a personal relationship with Stalin, but also to speak for the British as well, certainly seems to have struck Churchill, for even though he had indicated to the War Cabinet on 16 March that he agreed with Roosevelt, he made his own bid to play that role when he asked Maisky whether Stalin would welcome a visit from himself.³⁸ He was thinking of somewhere like Baku or Astrakhan. Maisky thought Stalin would come and meet him, but the idea was not taken further until the end of July 1942.

By then, the nascent alliance had been formally established in the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, though without an agreement on frontiers. Molotov had come to London and had agreed to a twenty-year treaty of co-operation in place of an overtly political arrangement, but he thought he had secured what the Soviets primarily wanted: a promise from Roosevelt of a second front in 1942. Churchill had been at pains to point out to him that no promise had been made, only a statement that they would urgently investigate the possibilities.³⁹ The British had then persuaded the Americans that even a large-scale raid, code-named SLEDGEHAMMER, was out of the question in 1942. Churchill and Roosevelt had agreed instead, against the inclinations of their military advisors, to launch an invasion of French North Africa, code-named GYMNAST (later changed to TORCH).⁴⁰ The

decision coincided unfortunately with the disaster of PQ17, the latest Anglo-American convoy bringing supplies to the USSR, which left Iceland on 27 June. Fearing attack by the German battleship *Tirpitz*, the Royal Navy escort had been withdrawn, and the ships ordered to proceed independently. German submarines and aircraft took a terrible toll; only nine out of thirty-four reached Soviet ports. Churchill's first response was to cancel any further such convoys until the end of the year. Moreover, the German offensive had indeed materialised, and by July the Soviet armies were in full retreat back towards the Caucasus.⁴¹ Stalin's reaction to Churchill's news was, unsurprisingly, bitter and reproachful:

According to our naval experts, the arguments of British naval experts on the necessity of stopping delivery of war supplies to the northern harbours of the U.S.S.R. are untenable. They are convinced that, given goodwill and readiness to honour obligations, steady deliveries could be effected with heavy loss to the Germans.... Of course I do not think steady deliveries to northern Soviet ports are possible without risk or loss. But then no major task can be carried out in wartime without risk or losses.... I never imagined that the British Government would deny us delivery of war materials precisely now, when the Soviet Union is badly in need of them in view of the grave situation on the Soviet-German front....

As to ... opening a second front in Europe, I fear the matter is taking an improper turn. In view of the situation on the Soviet-German front, I state most emphatically that the Soviet Government cannot tolerate the second front in Europe being postponed till 1943.

I hope you will not take it amiss that I have seen fit to give you my frank and honest opinion and that of my colleagues on the points raised in your message.⁴²

Britain had suffered its own setbacks in the Western Desert, having lost Tobruk in June: by July Axis forces commanded by General Erwin Rommel had advanced as far as Alamein in Egypt, just sixty miles from Alexandria. Typically, Churchill decided to go out in person and address what he suspected was a problem in the high command of the British forces. Without knowing of Churchill's plans, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, who had

replaced Cripps in Moscow in March 1942, wrote of his concern at Soviet reactions to the news concerning the second front and the convoys. Clark Kerr was an eccentric and unconventional diplomat, who attached great importance to personal interactions and emotional responses. Unlike Cripps, he had got on well in his first meeting with Stalin (the political situation having changed greatly) and felt that in a similar face-to-face meeting, Churchill would be able to impress Stalin with his fighting spirit and thereby modify the impression given by the recent decisions that the British were not prepared to engage the enemy to help the Soviets.⁴³ He suggested that Molotov might well have failed to convey this fighting spirit when he reported back to Stalin after his London mission. Clark Kerr suggested that a personal visit was the only way to explain the second front decision to Stalin, and thought it would be beneficial for the alliance as a whole for the two men finally to meet each other. Eden showed the telegram to Churchill, who was immediately taken with the idea and resolved to go on from Egypt to meet Stalin.⁴⁴

Churchill wired to Stalin:

We could survey the war together and take decisions hand-in-hand. I could then tell you plans we have made with President Roosevelt for offensive action in 1942.⁴⁵

The idea appealed to Churchill for the same reasons that he had been considering such a trip earlier, now revived in his mind by Clark Kerr's suggestion. He later described his mission as "like carrying a large lump of ice to the North Pole," but his aim was never simply to break the news that the second front would be in French North Africa, not Northern France.⁴⁶ That could be done by telegram; to go in person would only expose Churchill directly to Soviet reproaches. Churchill's decision to make this dangerous journey, about which he was clearly apprehensive, was based on his desire to do more than simply be an unwelcome messenger. Talking to Stalin in person was something he had been wishing to do since March, when it became obvious that strategic planning with

the Americans would not be the smooth matter he originally anticipated. Success in persuading Stalin of the wisdom of TORCH would open up the possibility of persuading him to share Churchill's overall strategic vision: "closing the ring" by operations on the Axis periphery (notably in the Mediterranean and Norway, and by involving Turkey in the war) combined with relentless strategic bombing of Germany. This would have the further effect, and one that Churchill would welcome, of starting meaningful Big Three co-operation with a bias towards Churchill's own strategic inclinations. He was going to Moscow fresh from discovering that American planners had quite different strategic views, which meant that the reality of the Anglo-American part of Big Three co-operation was not going to be the smooth process, based on shared culture and values, that he had first anticipated when sending his telegram in December 1941 to Eden in Moscow. Even though they had not been followed up beyond a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador, Roosevelt's suggestions that he should handle the Soviets for the two of them, taken with this strategic divergence, led Churchill to seek to mould the still-undefined Allied relationship with the Soviets. None of this was stated explicitly by Churchill, but when viewed in this light, much of what Churchill said and did in Moscow is explained.

Churchill asked again to meet in Astrakhan or the Caucasus: Stalin insisted that he could not leave Moscow during the "intense struggle" on the Soviet front. This is often depicted as typical Stalin callousness, exposing the 67-year old Churchill to an extra eight hundred miles of hazardous flying, but Stalin had a genuine reason to wish to keep at the centre of the direction of the war, quite apart from his own aversion to flying, with his vital southern front collapsing before his eyes. Churchill left for Egypt on 1 August, having written to King George VI that his hope for the Moscow leg of the trip was that "I may perhaps make the situation less edged." His objectives for the mission actually seem

to have been little more than this hope. There were no preparatory briefs from either the Foreign Office or the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Beaverbrook and another close Churchill confidant, Brendan Bracken, newly appointed Minister of Information, both wanted to go, probably to increase their standing with the British public. On advice from Eden, Churchill did not take them, but he did not take Eden either—only Cadogan from the Foreign Office and Brooke to represent the Chiefs of Staff, supplemented by other military figures from the Middle East command.⁴⁷ All this reflected both the rather *ad hoc* nature of the mission and also Churchill's main purpose, which was personally to engage with Stalin. For that he needed no advisors present. Rather belatedly, once he was in the Middle East, he decided he would like an American representative with him and, with Roosevelt's permission, Averell Harriman joined the mission while Churchill was in Cairo. This may well have been influenced by the fact that Churchill found Harriman, Roosevelt's personal envoy in London, a most congenial travelling companion.

Actual exchange with Roosevelt regarding this mission had also reflected the nature both of the enterprise, and of Churchill's subtle emplacing of himself as the intermediary with Stalin and the voice of Anglo-American strategy. On 29 July, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt, "I do not propose to embark on an argument, but Stalin will no doubt expect some account of our recent conversations here on the second front." At this point still referring to communication by telegram, he suggested that he should cite the memorandum he had given Molotov in June making clear no promise had been made to open a second front in 1942, but then go on to say that "certain action" had been agreed, while giving no information as to time or place.⁴⁸ Roosevelt felt that Stalin should be told more definitely that there would be action, without giving definite details, and argued for understanding of Stalin's position:

I agree with you that your reply to Stalin must be handled with great care. We have got always to bear in mind the

personality of our ally and the very difficult and dangerous situation that confronts him. No-one can be expected to approach the war from a world point of view whose country has been invaded. I think we should try to put ourselves in his place.⁴⁹

After Clark Kerr's suggestion of a personal meeting Churchill resolved to go much further in confiding in Stalin than Roosevelt was suggesting. He was under greater domestic pressure to show that action was being taken to help the Soviets than was Roosevelt (American public pressure was more Pacific-oriented), but this also reflected the way Churchill had already been manoeuvring, by taking on himself the task of telegraphing to Stalin on strategic as well as convoy matters. He proceeded to ask Stalin to join him in a meeting before putting the idea to Roosevelt—he simply informed the president that he had done so, and wrote, "I hope you will authorise me to tell him what we have settled. I am sure I can state the case in all its bearings."⁵⁰ Roosevelt did not directly reply to this, and initially rejected Harriman's suggestion that he accompany Churchill, feeling it might imply that Harriman was keeping an eye on Churchill. He was glad to acquiesce when Churchill requested Harriman's presence. Having received no response from Roosevelt to his plan to go to Moscow, Churchill had wired, "I should greatly like to have your aid and countenance in my talks with Joe.... I feel that things would be easier if we all seemed to be together. I have a somewhat raw job."⁵¹ Taking Harriman in this way, who did not have the status of an official presidential envoy to the Soviets, meant that Churchill had the advantage of appearing to have American endorsement for what he would say, while not being encumbered by an equal-ranking American participant, who could intervene in the discussion or in other ways impede the development of a Churchill-Stalin bilateral relationship. Roosevelt was happy to have Harriman there, reporting back to him what was said, but with no responsibility: "I think

your idea is sound and I am telling Stalin Harriman will be at his disposal to help in any way.”⁵²

On 7 August, Ivan Maisky set out for Stalin what he thought were the reasons for Churchill’s wish to meet him. He saw three main objectives in Churchill’s mind, and allowing for Maisky’s ideological bias and his need to keep in step with the views of his leader, he was strikingly perceptive. He saw one reason to be the need to deflect public and parliamentary criticism about the lack of military operations in support of the Soviets. Another, which he saw to be a significant factor, was Churchill’s desire to formulate a unified strategy, and, interestingly, Maisky noted that Churchill “wants to serve as a link between the United States and the Soviet Union in this respect.” Maisky thought that “Churchill has set himself the task of establishing a close personal contact with Comrade Stalin, somehow dovetailing Anglo-American strategic plans with Soviet plans.” Maisky believed Churchill’s third objective to be the avoidance of a second front, at least partly because he believed the British army was not up to it. He predicted that Churchill would present other and “less daunting” ways of helping the Soviet Union, such as strategic bombing, and joint operations in the North. Maisky suggested using the meeting to press for more supplies, if a second front was not going to materialise, and to start to forge a unified allied strategy. Maisky’s message, only recently available, sheds interesting light not only on Churchill, but also on Stalin’s conduct of their meetings.⁵³

Now accompanied by his rather lightweight team of Harriman, Cadogan, Air Marshal Tedder of the Desert Air Force and Generals Brooke and Wavell, Churchill set off for Moscow via Teheran, arriving, with only his entourage and Harriman, on 12 August.⁵⁴ Churchill’s first meeting took place with Stalin later that day. It was a small-scale, intimate affair, with Churchill accompanied only by Clark Kerr, Harriman and the embassy interpreter, Charles Dunlop.⁵⁵ For such an important meeting, Churchill had

done little preparation (it was not his habit to seek much in the way of briefing from his experts, particularly the diplomatic ones), and was relying on his personality to win over Stalin, whom he had come rather to underestimate as a simple-minded “peasant.” It is a common criticism of Roosevelt that he placed too much reliance on his ability to “charm” Stalin: Churchill’s approach to this mission suggests that reliance on charm was not confined to Roosevelt, and indeed later in the mission, Stalin himself made an attempt (ultimately quite successful) to “charm” his guest.

In addressing his task, Churchill adopted a tactic he had used before, with Roosevelt.⁵⁶ He began by stating the worst aspect to a problem, and then gave his compromise solution, which if presented at the start would have seemed inadequate. This approach appeared to bear fruit in this opening meeting. Churchill delivered the bad news immediately and without equivocation, telling Stalin that Anglo-American planners had ruled out a cross-Channel invasion in 1942. Stalin again expressed his disappointment with this decision, but Churchill sweetened the pill with a somewhat exaggerated description of the destruction being caused by British strategic bombing of Germany. He then sprang on the Soviet leader the plan to land in French North Africa. He drew a crocodile and said they would attack its soft belly as well as the hard snout. Stalin responded, “may God help this enterprise to succeed.” He quickly identified four reasons why this operation was advantageous: that it would attack the enemy in his undefended rear, it would make the Germans and French fight each other, it would put Italy out of action, and it would keep the Spaniards neutral.⁵⁷ From these remarks it appears that Stalin anticipated that the operations in the Mediterranean would expand beyond TORCH’s ostensible objective of the liberation of North Africa.

Clark Kerr took the official minutes, and in addition left in his private office papers an account giving more “colour,” which gives a remarkable picture of this important event:

It was interesting to watch the impact of the two men. Clash and recoil and clash again, and then a slow but unmistakable coming together as each got the measure of the other, and in the end, much apparent understanding and goodwill. To me who am in a way responsible for the meeting it meant some very anxious moments. But at the end of today’s meeting I felt satisfied that it had been abundantly wise. Now the two men know each other and each one will be able to put the right value on the messages—and they are very frequent—that pass between them. At times both were very blunt, as if each one sought by his bluntness to make a dint upon the other. I think that each succeeded and that the dints were deep. Each one was very restless. Stalin kept getting up and walking across the big room to a writing table into which he delved for cigarettes. These he tore to bits and stuffed into his absurd curly pipe. In his turn the P.M., when he had shot a bolt, got up and had a walk, pulling from his heated buttocks the seat of his trousers which had clearly stuck to them.... There was something about this dumpy figure plucking at his backside which suggested immense strength but little distinction....
... [later] The PM was in very good humour, he felt that he had got away with it... Harriman ... tended, I thought to bumsuck the P.M. and the P.M. liked it.⁵⁸

Churchill thus came away from the meeting believing that he had managed to carry it off. He telegraphed to the War Cabinet that “courtesy and dignity had failed,” but that Stalin’s four points in favour of TORCH had shown his “swift and complete mastery of a hitherto novel problem.” He concluded optimistically, “I expect I shall establish a solid and sincere relationship with this man.”⁵⁹

The self-congratulation was premature, however, and may have had an effect on what followed. One of the significant facts of the trip was that Churchill was accommodated at State Villa Number Seven, which was Stalin’s own *dacha*, rather than at the British Embassy. Churchill gloated to the newly arrived British military

representatives that Stalin was a peasant whom he knew how to handle. Too late did Air Marshal Arthur Tedder warn of the likelihood that the *dacha* was bugged.⁶⁰

Whether such eavesdropping had an effect on Soviet attitudes is unclear, but certainly the mood had changed by the next day, and an issue Churchill thought had been resolved was revealed to be very much still in dispute. Warning signs were evident in the morning when Molotov observed to Churchill that there was no certainty the North African operation would go ahead—after all, the second front was not going to, despite Roosevelt’s statement in June that it would.⁶¹ This was just a prelude to the storm that Stalin unleashed later. He presented a memorandum criticising not only the decision not to open a second front, but also the delivery of equipment to the Red Army and its quality. He then released a stream of invective at Churchill, accusing the British Army and Navy of cowardice, and the Allies of breaking faith and of failing to acknowledge the significance of the Soviet struggle. According to Colonel Ian Jacob, who took the minutes for the British, the effect of this was made even worse by the crude English of Vladimir Pavlov, Stalin’s interpreter. These official minutes do not convey the full flavour of the meeting in the same way that Clark Kerr’s more impressionistic (and less professional) account of the first meeting had done, but even so, some idea of Stalin’s bitterness comes across:

M. STALIN suggested that higher sacrifices were called for. Ten thousand men a day were being sacrificed on the Russian front.... The Russians did not complain of the sacrifices they were making, but the extent of them should be recognised.

MR. CHURCHILL said that he envied the Russians their glory, and he hoped that we very soon would show by our deeds that the Democracies were neither sluggish nor cowardly and were just as ready as the Russians to shed blood.... The existence of the oceans and the need to move over them in ships were facts for which it hardly seemed right that we should be reproached.

He earnestly desired to hear the ring of comradeship in the discussions. He well knew what the Russians were

going through: we ourselves had fought alone for a year.... He had come a long way in the hope that he would receive the hand of comradeship and that he would be believed in a spirit of loyalty and friendship.... It grieved his heart that the Russians did not think we were doing our utmost in the common cause.

M. STALIN said that it was not a case of mistrust, but only of a divergence of view.... He felt that if the British army had been fighting the Germans as much as the Russian Army, it would not be so frightened of them. The Russians, and indeed the R.A.F. had shown that it was possible to beat the Germans. The British infantry could do the same provided they acted at the same time as the Russians.

MR. CHURCHILL said that he pardoned the remark which M. Stalin had made on account of the bravery of the Russian Army.⁶²

Churchill described this as “a most unpleasant discussion.” Stalin, he wrote, had said a great many insulting things:

I repulsed these squarely, but without taunts. I suppose he is not used to being contradicted repeatedly, but he did not become at all angry or animated. He kept his eyes half closed, always avoiding mine, uttering at intervals a string of insults.... He will have to go a long way to do any good with me.⁶³

In launching this attack, it is generally assumed that Stalin was following a favourite ploy: to appear conciliatory at the first meeting, raising expectations in those he was dealing with, then taking an obstructionist stance, followed by a slight softening of attitude that would come as such a relief that it would be seen to be praiseworthy statesmanship. An alternative is that he was letting off steam, either for his own sake, or to satisfy hard-liners in the Politburo (as Churchill speculated to the War Cabinet).⁶⁴ He may well also have felt that he had missed a trick by being too understanding at the first meeting, and he now wished to build up some negotiating capital by not accepting the Anglo-American plan without gaining something in return. Clark Kerr believed that he may well have been carried away by the skilful way Churchill had unveiled TORCH at the first meeting, but had since cooled off, and having consulted “his own boys” decided he

might still have a chance of diverting the attack from North Africa to Europe.⁶⁵ There is also the possibility, in view of what Maisky had written on 7 August, that Stalin was attempting, extremely crudely, to talk Churchill out of his fear of pitting the British army against the Germans: Maisky's report to Stalin of Churchill's attitude gives an extra layer of meaning to Stalin's remark about it not being hard to fight the Germans once you got started—it may not have been meant as an insult, but as an encouragement, but this was lost in the inadequacies of translation. Whatever Stalin's motivation, all it did was draw forth a bullish response from Churchill, who, like Stalin, dropped diplomatic form and delivered an eloquent and rhetorical speech. He said that he had come to try and establish real comradeship, only for his motives and sincerity to be questioned: there was no “ring of comradeship” in Stalin's attitude. Dunlop, the interpreter, proved as inadequate for the task as Pavlov had been, and stumbled in translating Churchill's words (though in his defence, Churchill tended to take little account of the needs of the translator once he had launched into full-blown rhetoric). At one point, according to Jacob's later recollections, Stalin stopped Churchill and said that he did not understand the words but admired the fighting spirit evident in Churchill's tone. Both men having vented their spleen, though through inadequate interpretation, the mood calmed a little. The discussion shifted to the situation in the Caucasus and Stalin offered the British soldiers who were present a demonstration of the *Katyusha* rocket launcher.⁶⁶

During the meeting, Harriman had passed Churchill a note that a similar change in mood had been evident in the second meeting with Stalin in October 1941, implying that this may have been either a tactic, or a result of pressure from behind the scenes.⁶⁷ This suggestion did not mollify Churchill, however, and he came away from the meeting deeply disgruntled. He was inclined not to attend the state dinner, since Stalin had been

so offensive. When Clark Kerr called at the *dacha* the following morning, he found Churchill to be like a

wounded lion. He declaimed against Stalin in ponderous Gibbonesque periods.... He declared he was damned if he would keep his engagement to dine with Stalin tonight.⁶⁸

His method of handling Stalin had failed, but once again his lack of diplomatic finesse may have saved the day. His mood would have been evident to any of the Soviet listeners of the goings-on at the *dacha*, and he made little attempt to hide it at the lavish Kremlin banquet given in his honour, which Churchill finally did grudgingly agree to attend. He chose, however to dress in his remarkable one-piece garment that was sometimes called his “siren suit.” The Soviets, who were punctilious with regard to etiquette, were all, of course, in formal dress or uniform and must have been greatly taken aback, if not insulted. However, perhaps himself perceiving that his own tactics had gone awry, Stalin had reverted to his congenial *persona*, making toasts and sharing humorous remarks with his colleagues. For a time Churchill cheered up under Stalin’s flattery, but the mood faded, when Churchill asked if he was forgiven for his past (meaning his efforts to defeat the Bolshevik revolution) and Stalin replied, “Who am I to forgive. Only God can forgive.”⁶⁹ Stalin continued in party mood, but his *bonhomie* increasingly grated on Churchill. Stalin’s habit of moving around the room to clink glasses with people he was toasting, and the restrictions of interpretation, magnified Churchill’s grumpy mood. Though normally such lavish food and drink would have appealed to him, he now seemed to find it distasteful.⁷⁰ He perked up for a photograph session, but when Stalin suggested watching a film, Churchill abruptly took his leave. There is no evidence that this was a contrived tactic, but as a riposte to Stalin’s own earlier demonstration of pique, it was an effective response. Stalin followed Churchill to the door, jogging to keep up; an unprecedented gesture from the *Vozhd’*, and probably a remarkable sight for onlookers.⁷¹

Back at the *dacha*, Churchill voiced his discontent eloquently, saying he would leave Stalin to fight his own battles. "I ought not to have come," he said, though he added that he might be able to work with "that man," but for the language barrier. But, he told Wilson, his doctor, he had deliberately said "Goodbye," not "Good evening," and said, "I am going to leave this man to fight his own battles."⁷² According to Clark Kerr and Wilson, the mood was no better the following day. The ambassador has left a detailed account of his attempt to persuade Churchill to make one more effort to get on with Stalin (again confirming that this was one of the ostensible purposes of the mission). Clark Kerr's account of the conversation is typically colourful and cannot be verified, but there is no reason to doubt its general veracity.⁷³ According to the ambassador, he argued to Churchill that the Soviets were indeed rough and inexperienced, fresh from the plough or the lathe. They said what they thought. However, that was just their manner, and too much should not be read into it. Churchill could not afford to risk the Soviets going their own way in the war, and it would play badly with British public opinion. He should use all his personal charm to overcome Stalin's unfortunate manner. Churchill muttered that he had been insulted, but Clark Kerr pressed that he could not risk the USSR being defeated as a result of his inaction, and it was up to him to use his skills to patch things up. It was in his power, said Clark Kerr, to "nobble Stalin." According to the ambassador's account, Churchill was persuaded by these arguments not to leave in a huff, but to give Stalin one more chance. Whether Churchill ever seriously intended leaving early, we cannot know. Wilson and Clark Kerr thought his threat genuine.⁷⁴

Jacob's account makes much less of Churchill's mood, saying that Churchill was already reconsidering the implications of the second meeting with Stalin before Clark Kerr arrived at the *dacha*. Jacob noted in his diary that it was he who suggested that Churchill meet Stalin again. He also suggested using the interpreter who had done the job

at the military meetings, Major Arthur Birse.⁷⁵ Clark Kerr arrived after Jacob had left for a meeting, so it is possible that the ambassador gave parallel advice. He was encouraged to do so by Cadogan and by Wilson. So Jacob could have underestimated the continuing strength of Churchill's feelings. It is tempting to think that Churchill was making a show for the microphones, and did not seriously intend to leave without another attempt at winning Stalin over to his point of view. None of the accounts written at the time suggests this, but Cadogan had been involved in just such a ruse during Eden's visit in December. A Machiavellian tactic like this is somewhat out of keeping with the usual depiction of Churchill as rather an instinctive and emotional man, but Churchill, an immensely experienced politician, was quite capable of subterfuge.⁷⁶ It is perhaps suggestive that when Clark Kerr arrived to speak to him they went outside and walked in the garden, away from prying ears—even though it was an unsatisfactory place to hold a conversation because of the need to walk in single file. On the other hand, Clark Kerr clearly thought Churchill needed to be persuaded.⁷⁷

The result was that Cadogan sought out Molotov to arrange a further meeting. He was stalled for hours: this seems to have been a deliberate Soviet ploy, for some time in the afternoon Stalin's daughter was told to prepare to have Churchill over for dinner—even though when the meeting was finally arranged there was no mention of dinner, and indeed Churchill made arrangements to dine with the Polish General Anders after he had spoken for an hour or so with Stalin. He left, however, with the parting words that he would not leave the Kremlin until Stalin was “in his pocket.”⁷⁸

As it happened, the meeting, as Stalin seems to have intended, lasted for over seven hours, from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m., even though neither man had any particular objective in mind. British accounts of the meeting are limited to those of Churchill himself and his new interpreter, Birse. Stalin once again turned on the charm. Both had made their points

in their earlier meetings, and now relaxed somewhat in each other's company. They had no agenda and no burning issues on which they needed to take a stand or produce agreements. Consequently, the discussion was wide-ranging, of a kind that Churchill always seemed to enjoy. Churchill began by saying, "I hope that nothing stands between us. I came, apart from direct business, with the earnest wish for a personal understanding."⁷⁹ According to the Soviet record, Stalin said in reply, "The fact that he and Churchill had met and got to know each other [literally 'friend to friend'] and had prepared the ground for future agreements, had great significance. He was inclined to look at the matter more optimistically." As Edmonds points out, there was no need for him to say this if he did not mean it.⁸⁰ After a while, Stalin sprang his invitation to "go for a drink" in his flat. Churchill replied that he was in principle always in favour of such a policy. They then made the short journey through the Kremlin to Stalin's modest personal apartments. There they ate a fork buffet, served by Stalin's housekeeper and by Svetlana Stalina, and joined at Stalin's suggestion by Molotov. Jibes were made at Molotov's expense. Churchill said that while in the US, Molotov had secretly gone off to see New York City. No, said Stalin, it had been Chicago, "where the other gangsters live." Stalin excused the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 on the grounds that it was made to buy time and because he felt the British and French were not sincere in their own proposals for an agreement. Churchill even got him talking about collectivisation and the fate of the kulaks (which Stalin blamed on the hostility of the poorer peasants towards the wealthier smallholders, and the pressing need to mechanise).⁸¹

It was getting late, even by Churchill's standards, when a roast sucking pig was brought in. This was too much for Churchill, but it was around Stalin's usual dinnertime. Cadogan was called for, and after refusing Stalin's invitation to join him in dissecting the pig, he and Molotov contrived a somewhat bland but essentially positive joint

communiqué. This was an outcome that had seemed highly unlikely twenty-four hours earlier. Back at the *dacha*, while his bath was run (to prevent electronic eavesdropping?), Churchill spoke to Clark Kerr and Jacob and expressed his satisfaction with the outcome of his trip. He felt he had reached a personal relationship with Stalin similar to that with Roosevelt (an indication, like his “comradeship” remark to Stalin, that this was all along a prime objective of his).⁸² He telegraphed to Attlee that he and Stalin had got on easy and friendly terms—“I feel I have established a personal relationship which will be helpful.”⁸³ Clark Kerr agreed; Jacob was more dubious. He did concede that Churchill had got further with Stalin than anyone else could have, but actually to make friends with Stalin would be equivalent to making friends with a python.⁸⁴ However, Molotov wrote to Maisky that although the negotiations had not been smooth, the “extensive conversation in Comrade Stalin’s private residence” produced “a close personal rapport with the guest.”⁸⁵ At 5.30 in the morning, with Molotov having come to see him off, Churchill and his party flew back to Teheran.

Churchill had thus activated the personal element of the second wing of the war-winning Grand Alliance, to follow on from his journeys across the Atlantic. Indeed, the meeting was to remain the sole face-to-face contact of either Churchill or Roosevelt with Stalin until November 1943. It is easy, however, to dismiss it as of no significance.⁸⁶ The Soviets went on to fight, and win, their own battles, and it is unlikely that another way of conveying Churchill’s bad news would have produced a different military outcome. No formal agreements were reached, except a vague one on the principle of sharing information and another on the deployment of Anglo-American aircraft squadrons in the Caucasus.⁸⁷ No progress was made on political issues. Topics like the Soviet frontiers and Poland that were still major subjects of contention were not even touched upon.

There are also grounds for arguing that the Churchill-Stalin relationship remained full of suspicion.⁸⁸

To leave it at that, however, may be to miss the more intangible, but perhaps significant, aspects of the meetings in Moscow. The objective was never to reach firm agreements on substantive matters, but to test whether the two leaders, and their two states, could find some common foundations on which to build an alliance and overcome the sense of disconnectedness between their various war efforts that had become evident in the light of recent events. Churchill and Stalin had found common ground in their own discussion of military matters, as evidenced in their discussion of the relative merits of Churchill's ancestor the Duke of Marlborough, and the Duke of Wellington, as military commanders.⁸⁹ In addition, and of some importance for Churchill, Stalin had seemed enthusiastic about Churchill's pet scheme of a joint invasion of North Norway, and agreed with him about the desirability of getting Turkey into the war (though not optimistic it could be achieved). In this sense, Churchill might well have felt that Stalin's views of future strategy were preferable to that of some of the Americans, hence his declaration of respect for Stalin's "sure-footed and quick military judgement" and his sense of achievement at the end of the mission.⁹⁰

Churchill was not a naïve or simplistic statesman and, as with his personal relationship with Roosevelt, he remained aware that political differences had not been expunged by inter-personal cordiality. He had been trusting in his ability to win over a supposedly simple, peasant-minded, Soviet leader by strength of rhetoric. Stalin's refusal to be charmed left him without an alternative strategy. However, the final result, the last meeting when the air had been cleared and the reality of mutual need had dawned on both leaders, produced a long-lasting sense that at the heart of the impersonal, grim and ruthless Soviet state was a human figure who was capable of frankness and humour, and

who appeared in the last resort to attach importance to Churchill and his good opinion. He returned with an attitude to Stalin that was, if anything, more full of ambiguities than before, but one which, right to the end of the war, contained as one important element the sense that this was a man who could be dealt with. Churchill later said that if he could dine with Stalin once a week then all the difficulties would be capable of resolution.⁹¹

That Churchill regarded Stalin in such a positive light can partly be explained by the unexpected rapport of the final meeting, but it is also necessary to take into account the underlying purpose of the mission, which was rooted in the still embryonic nature of the Big Three relationship. As has been discussed above, the issue of the frontiers earlier in the year had quickly become overlaid with issues concerning how the partnership with the Soviets was to be managed, and who was best suited to lead it on the Anglo-American side. As Churchill's comments concerning "comradeship" demonstrate, getting to know Stalin was to all intents and purposes the aim of the trip. Given the news Churchill was bearing regarding the second front, the prospects were not good, but if successful, it would place Churchill in a position where Roosevelt could no longer claim that he had an advantage in relations with Stalin and should therefore make the running on behalf of the Anglo-American partnership. Coming so quickly after his June trip to Washington, BRACELET put Churchill in a good position to be the lynchpin or broker of the Grand Alliance. In Moscow, he had obtained a sympathetic audience, possibly even support, for his strategic vision for the pursuit of victory. If these were its aims, then the mission must be judged a success.

With regard to the meeting's impact on Stalin's attitudes, Clark Kerr concluded that Churchill by the force of his personality had dispelled the "long-standing and tenacious suspicions which have clouded the judgement of Stalin." He exaggerated: the conference clearly did not do that, but it may have been important in convincing Stalin

that the British would not themselves make a separate peace—a matter of some concern since the flight of Rudolf Hess to Britain in May 1941.⁹² Clark Kerr concluded that Stalin actually enjoyed Churchill's company, since there were few in the USSR with whom he could converse on such terms. If speculations about Stalin's inferiority complex had any grain of truth to them, then such meetings may well have brought satisfaction to Stalin by confirming his new-found status as a world statesman.⁹³ In that case, the simple fact of Churchill having gone there and shown his personality in such an undiplomatic, but ultimately honest, manner, should not be underestimated. Churchill and Stalin had been able to get the measure of each other, and each had made a contribution, difficult though they found it personally, to averting a disastrous breach in relations—and, more importantly, came intuitively to a basis on which the alliance could proceed. In this context, Stalin's remark to Churchill about getting to know each other as friends was telling. It was a "strange alliance" for them, and for Roosevelt too, and nothing in their previous political experience, extensive though it was, had prepared them for it, nor did their shared interest in history provide much in the way of a blueprint or guidelines as to how to manage this relationship. In mid-1942 it was possible for it to go in two directions—the war could continue to be fought as two (or more) separate conflicts. The alliance did not come into being fully formed, with regard to the manner in which the three leaders would relate to each other and manage issues of tension and political/strategic disagreement. The BRACELET mission to Moscow represents a crucial first stage, in which the two leaders, neither conceding ground on an issue that divided them profoundly, came to the conclusion that notwithstanding this, they could find scope for co-operation and sensed that each valued the other's contribution to what they (crucially) agreed was a common enterprise—this was implied in Churchill's key use of the term "comradeship," which had practical as much as sentimental connotations.

Relations had been founded upon the discussion of strategic issues, not political ones. Roosevelt is often characterised as the one who swept political issues under the carpet in the cause of short-term Allied unity—BRACELET shows Churchill and Stalin doing so before Roosevelt was really in the game. The essentially pragmatic basis for the conduct of the Grand Alliance—a way of managing potential disagreements by offsetting them and framing the relationship as primarily a warrior alliance—was established. It may have been vital for seeing the Alliance through to its victory.⁹⁴

Notes

- ¹ Clementine Churchill, letter 4 August 1942, cited in Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 161.
- ² Graham Ross analysed the mission most fully, and placed it in the context of the debate within the British government on how to handle the Soviets. He did not focus on the issue of the reasons for the mission, beyond breaking the news about the second front, nor did he consider in detail how Churchill's approach to the mission fitted in to the developing Big Three relationship, as this article does. See Graham Ross, "Operation Bracelet: Churchill in Moscow, 1942" in David Dilks, ed., *Retreat from Power*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1981), 101-119.
- ³ For the 1944 mission, see for example, J. Siracusa, "The Meaning of Tolstoy: Churchill, Stalin and the Balkans, Moscow October 1944" (*Diplomatic History* 3, 1979), 443-63; Albert Resis, "The Churchill-Stalin Percentages Agreement" (*American Historical Review* 82, 1978), 368-87; Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-east Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
- ⁴ John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993); David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). For an idiosyncratic account that views Churchill traditionally, but does attach significance to the first Moscow meeting, see David Stone, *War Summits: The Meetings That Shaped World War II and the Postwar World* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005), xiii, 247, 271.
- ⁵ Robin Edmonds, *The Big Three* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); David Reynolds, "Churchill, Roosevelt and the Stalin Enigma" in *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235-48; Martin Kitchen, "Winston Churchill and the Soviet Union During the Second World War" (*Historical Journal* 30, 1987), 415-36.
- ⁶ Lord Moran, *Churchill at War 1940-45* (London: Robinson, 2002), xx-xxix. John Colville observed that "Moran was seldom, if ever, present when history was made: but he was quite often invited to dinner afterwards," John W. Wheeler-Bennett, ed., *Action this Day: Working with Churchill* (Macmillan: London, 1968), 10, 30-6, 110-12. This was not quite accurate: Churchill's habit of declaiming on weighty issues last thing at night, while stripping for his bath, regardless of who was present, meant that Wilson, in attendance in his official capacity, was indeed often at the centre, at the least, of Churchill thinking out loud.
- ⁷ Charmley, *End of Glory*, 605.
- ⁸ Edmonds, *Big Three*, 454-5; Elisabeth Barker, *Churchill and Eden at War* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 128-31, 136.
- ⁹ Charmley, *End of Glory*, 316; *Daily Mirror*, 13 July 1939; Barker, *Churchill and Eden*, 225.

- ¹⁰ Robert Boothby to Lloyd George, 18 September 1939, Lloyd George papers G/3/13, House of Lords Record Office; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. 6: Finest Hour* (London: Heinemann, 1983) 44, 49, 98, 100-101.
- ¹¹ Churchill radio broadcast, 1 October 1939, Winston Churchill, *Into Battle* (London: Cassell, 1941), 108. Interestingly, Churchill found the key to the enigma to be the hard-headed pursuit of national interest, not ideology.
- ¹² Churchill radio broadcast, 20 January 1940, C. G. Eade, ed., *The War Speeches of the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill* vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1951), 137.
- ¹³ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, vol. 2: Their Finest Hour* (London: Cassell, 1949), 118; FO to Cripps, 13 June 1940, Foreign Office papers FO371/24844/N5808. All documents referred to are in the British National Archives, Kew, London, unless otherwise stated. An excellent selection of these documents, compiled by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and scanned in their original format, is available online at www.fco.gov.
- ¹⁴ Churchill to Stalin, 3 April 1941, FO371/29479/N1366.
- ¹⁵ Churchill to Eden and Beaverbrook, 14 October 1941, Prime Minister's Papers, PREM3/403. Churchill complained of Cripps that "if he had obeyed his instructions, it is more than possible that some kind of relationship would have been constructed between me and Stalin." In point of fact, as Gabriel Gorodetsky has pointed out, the message was far too cryptic to have had that effect, and it told Stalin nothing he did not already know, i.e. that the Soviets were basing considerable forces on his western frontier: Gabriel Gorodetsky, "Churchill's Warning to Stalin: A Reappraisal" (*Historical Journal* 29.4, 1986). Stalin's suspicions that the British wished to get the Soviets involved in war with Germany received a little further confirmation from the message, and even more from Cripps veiled threats about a British "separate peace"—he was also susceptible to the skilful German deception plan that aimed to persuade the Soviets that their build-up in the East was part of their preparations, out of range of the Royal Air Force, for the invasion of the United Kingdom, and that rumours that they were directed against the USSR were part of their own cover plan.
- ¹⁶ Churchill to Eden, 22 April 1941, PREM3/395/16.
- ¹⁷ FO to Lord Halifax (ambassador to US), 17 June 1941, FO371/29501/N2840; FO-Ministry of Information meeting, 17 June 1941, FO371/29483/N2904; Charmley, *End of Glory*, 455.
- ¹⁸ Churchill to Roosevelt, 14 June 1941, PREM3/230/1; Duff Cooper to Eden, 28 June 1941, Ministry of Information Papers INF1/913; War Cabinet minutes, WM(41) 64th meeting, 30 June 1941, CAB65/18.
- ¹⁹ Churchill radio broadcast, BBC, 9 pm, 22 June 1941, in Eade, ed., *War Speeches*, 450-4; John Colville diary, 22 June 1941, in J. Colville, *Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985) vol. 1, 1939-October 1941.
- ²⁰ Harvey diary, 28 July 1941, published in John Harvey, ed., *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1941-1945* (London: Collins, 1978).
- ²¹ Churchill draft telegram to Cripps, 3 October 1941, FO371/29491/N5679; Churchill to Cripps, 28 October 1941, FO371/29471/N6583.
- ²² Churchill to Beaverbrook, 30 August 1941, Beaverbrook Papers D/94, House of Lords Record Office. Although Churchill sent General Ismay, who was essentially his Chief of Staff on military matters, with Beaverbrook, he did not give Ismay instructions to enter into strategic discussions with the Soviets, and Beaverbrook followed an approach of offering the Soviets whatever they asked for. This avoided contention on the issue of the Soviets providing information as to their production and their plans (which they did not want to do) and allowed Beaverbrook and Harriman to complete their work in only six days, but it did not entirely please Stalin, as discussion of British plans to help the Soviets by military action, which was his first priority, was avoided. For Cripps' dissatisfaction with this aspect of the conference and the overall government approach to a strategy that integrated the Soviet and British wars against Germany, see his diary for 4 October 1941 in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Stafford Cripps in Moscow 1940-1942: Diaries and Papers* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2007), 178.
- ²³ Stalin to Churchill, 8 November 1941, FO954/21B. Alongside his complaints, Stalin raised again the suggestion of a post-war alliance. For Churchill's initial response, see War Cabinet meeting WM(41)111th Confidential Annexe, 11 November 1941, CAB65/24.
- ²⁴ Eden conversation with Maisky, 20 November 1941, FO371/29471/N6704; Harvey diary, 21 November 1941; Churchill to Stalin, 21 November 1941, FO371/29472/N6750.
- ²⁵ War Cabinet paper WP(41)238, 8 October 1941, CAB66/19.
- ²⁶ Eden memorandum, 4 December 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1941* vol. I, 192-4; War Cabinet meeting, 4 December 1941, WM(41)124th meeting, Confidential Annexe CAB65/24.
- ²⁷ Eden memorandum of conversations with Stalin, 16-22 December 1941 WP(42)8, 5 January 1942, Avon Papers FO954/25A.

- ²⁸ Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow*, 189-96, 205.
- ²⁹ Churchill to Attlee, 20 December 1941, while *en route* to the USA PREM 3/399; Churchill to Eden, 7 January 1942, PREM3/399, and 8 January 1942, FO371/32874/N108.
- ³⁰ War Cabinet meeting, 6 February 1942, WM(42)17th CAB65/29.
- ³¹ War Cabinet meeting, 25 February 1942, WM(42)24th CAB65/29; Beaverbrook paper “Controversy Over Russia,” 3 March 1942, FO954/25A. Beaverbrook’s public reason for his resignation was health—but his asthma was no worse at this time than at others when he had soldiered on. He remained a Churchill confidant, though his influence on Churchill’s views is problematic and unquantifiable, which has led to it simply being ignored in most accounts of Churchill’s attitudes.
- ³² Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union*, 97; Eden at War Cabinet, WM(42)1st meeting, 1 January 1942, CAB65/29.
- ³³ General Alan Brooke diary, 17 April 1942, published in Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *War Diaries 1939-1945: Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001). The chances of the Soviets achieving their ambitious objectives may have been slim by early March, but the counter-offensive on the Moscow front did not come to a halt until April. The Soviets launched a further, spoiling, offensive at Kharkov on 12 May, which was to have disastrous consequences in compromising Soviet abilities to resist the main German offensive, which began on 28 June. David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1995), 96-8. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) at the start of June was still speculating on the likely outcome on the Soviet-German front that summer, uncertain which side would break. Although at that time the Chiefs of Staff thought the JIC was too optimistic as far as Soviet chances were concerned, it seems clear fears of imminent Soviet collapse were unlikely to have been a factor earlier in the spring, JIC(42)200(F) “The Possible Course of the Russian Campaign and Its Implications,” COS(42)169th meeting, AIR40/2344.
- ³⁴ There had been some concern in the FO in early February that the Soviet winter offensive would be so successful that the Germans would be driven out of the USSR, and that Stalin would then make terms, but this concern had diminished by the start of March, as the Soviet offensive lost momentum, Sargent memorandum 5 February, Cadogan minute 7 February, Eden minute 8 February 1942, FO371/32905/N885, G. M. Wilson minute, 22 March 1942, FO371/32906/N1492.
- ³⁵ War Cabinet meeting, 25 March 1942, WM(42)37th CAB65/29; Churchill to Roosevelt, 7 March 1942, FO371/32877/N1174; Cadogan minutes, 4 March 1942, FO371/32876/N1156, and 7 May 1942, FO371/32881/N2524.
- ³⁶ Harvey diary, 6 March 1942; Brooke diary, 5 March 1942.
- ³⁷ Roosevelt to Churchill, 18 March 1942 in Warren Kimball, ed., *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 1984), vol. 1, 421.
- ³⁸ Harvey diary, 17 March 1942.
- ³⁹ Aide memoire to Molotov, 10 June 1942, CAB120/684; Lord Avon, *The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 330; Harvey diary, 10 June 1942.
- ⁴⁰ Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference, 22 July 1942, CAB99/190—the American delegates were General Marshall, Admiral King and Harry Hopkins; War Cabinet 94th meeting, 22 July 1942, CAB65/31; Brooke diary, 24 July 1942. See also War Cabinet 73rd meeting, 11 June 1942, CAB65/30, and War Cabinet paper summarising Churchill’s strategic discussions in Washington, WP(42)278, 2 July 1942, CAB66/26. Churchill much preferred an attack on the Germans in North Norway, code-named Operation JUPITER, which he was to propose to Stalin in August. The Chiefs of Staff consistently opposed the idea as a diversion of resources.
- ⁴¹ On the day of his telegram to Churchill, Stalin recalled to Moscow the commander of the southern front, Marshal Timoshenko, with his forces retreating in disarray, and on 28 July issued the “no step back” order threatening death to any commander who allowed unauthorised retreat.
- ⁴² Stalin to Churchill, 23 July 1942 (Soviet translation), *Stalin’s Correspondence with Churchill and Attlee 1941-1945* (New York: Capricorn, 1965), document 57. The British translation in PREM3/463 has Stalin complaining that the second front was not being treated with the seriousness it deserved: “I must state in the most emphatic manner that the Soviet Government cannot acquiesce in the postponement of a second front in Europe until 1943.” Stalin was (correctly) reading between the lines of Churchill’s telegram of 18 July: Churchill spoke of “preparations going forward on a vast scale for Anglo-American mass invasion of the Continent.” But he had gone on to say, “Believe me, there is nothing that is useful and sensible that we and the Americans will not do to help you in your grand struggle. The President and I are ceaselessly searching for means of overcoming the extraordinary difficulties which the geography, sea-water and the enemy’s air power interpose.”

- ⁴³ Clark Kerr had described Stalin as “just my cup of tea.” They had been forced into each other’s company for an extended period in the Kremlin air-raid shelter, and had filled the time talking on a range of subjects, including tobacco and women. Clark Kerr to Cripps, 26 April 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁴⁴ Clark Kerr to Cadogan, 28 July 1942, PREM3/76A/1. Cadogan minuted on this telegram, “I attach enormous importance to a Stalin-Churchill meeting. [The time] may well come when the Russians are no longer attracted by ‘jam tomorrow.’ We may have to put our cards on the table.” Eden noted, “Took the telegram round to Winston, and he jumped at it,” diary, 30 July 1942, in Avon, *The Reckoning* 338; Harvey diary, 30 July 1942.
- ⁴⁵ Churchill to Stalin, 31 July 1942.
- ⁴⁶ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, vol. 4: Hinge of Fate* (London: Cassell, 1951), 428; Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York: Random House, 1946), 125; Churchill told the War Cabinet that he would give Stalin an account of the Anglo-American discussions (thereby ensuring Stalin got Churchill’s take on them first) and their plans for 1942, War Cabinet, 30 July 1942, WM(42)100th CAB65/27; Churchill told his wife, “I am not looking forward to this part of my mission because I bear so little in my hand, and sympathise so much with those to whom I go.” Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, 161, 169, 170. Churchill’s use of the phrase “carrying ice to the North Pole” is interesting, as its meaning is obscure. The first impression is that he is saying it was a hard task – but actually the phrase is more akin to “carrying coals to Newcastle.” Perhaps he meant to convey that he was taking something (bad news) somewhere that it was not wanted, and where there was plenty of it already.
- ⁴⁷ Churchill was also accompanied by a small personal entourage of Dr Charles Wilson, Leslie Rowan, Patrick Kinna and Commander C. R. Thompson of his private staff, his detective, Inspector Thompson, and also Colonel Ian Jacob from the Chiefs of Staff secretariat to service the military men.
- ⁴⁸ Churchill to Roosevelt, 29 July 1942, Kimball, ed., *Correspondence*, 544; Harvey diary, 30 June 1942.
- ⁴⁹ Roosevelt to Churchill, 29 July 1942, Kimball, ed., *Correspondence*, 545. Roosevelt strongly supported the idea of sending an air force to fight on the Soviet southern front.
- ⁵⁰ Churchill to Roosevelt, 31 July 1942, Kimball, ed., *Correspondence*, 551.
- ⁵¹ Churchill to Roosevelt, Egypt, 4 August 1942, Kimball, ed., *Correspondence*, 553.
- ⁵² Roosevelt to Churchill, 5 August 1942, Kimball, ed., *Correspondence*, 553.
- ⁵³ Maisky to Stalin, 7 August 1942, in “New Documents about Winston Churchill from Russian Archives” (*International Affairs* (Moscow), 47.5, 2001), 131-4.
- ⁵⁴ The aircraft carrying Cadogan and the generals experienced engine trouble and had to return to Teheran. They arrived the following day.
- ⁵⁵ Stalin was accompanied by Molotov and Marshal Kliment Voroshilov of the Soviet High Command (*Stavka*).
- ⁵⁶ He discussed the tactic of breaking the worst news directly and immediately and then revealing what the Anglo-Americans were going to do, in his initial meeting with the ambassador, Clark Kerr manuscript journal of BRACELET conference, 12 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁵⁷ Notes of meeting with Stalin, Kremlin, 7 pm, 12 August 1942, CAB127/23.
- ⁵⁸ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 12 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁵⁹ Churchill to Attlee, 13 August 1942, FO800/300; Jacob diary, 13 August 1942, published in Charles Richardson, *From Churchill’s Secret Circle to the BBC: The Biography of Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Jacob* (London: Brassey’s, 1991); Sir Charles Wilson told Clark Kerr that Churchill had said to him after the first meeting “I want that man to like me,” Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 13 August 1942, FO800/300. Harvey concluded from the reports back to London that Churchill was “clearly much taken by Stalin,” diary, 13 August 1942.
- ⁶⁰ Lord Tedder, *With Prejudice* (London: Cassell, 1966), 330; David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945* (London: Cassell, 1972), 471.
- ⁶¹ Churchill conversation with Molotov, 13 August 1942, PREM3/76A/12; Records of BRACELET Conference, FO800/402.
- ⁶² Minutes of meeting at Kremlin, 11.15 pm, 13 August 1942, CAB127/23. Present were Churchill, Stalin, Molotov, Harriman, Cadogan, Wavell, Brooke and Tedder, together with Jacob and the interpreters. Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, 185; Jacob diary, 13 August 1942; Ross, “Operation Bracelet,” 111; Wheeler-Bennett, ed., *Action this Day*, 215. Churchill’s intended agenda for his second meeting with Stalin covered shipping losses on the Russian convoys, further statements about growing Allied air strength, post-war co-operation, Soviet contingency planning in the Caucasus and Caspian region (showing concern about potential German access to the Middle East: Brooke, from his observations on his flight to Moscow from Teheran was convinced Soviet defences there were totally inadequate) and Japan, memorandum for meeting with Stalin, 13 August 1942, PREM3/76/11.

- ⁶³ Churchill to Attlee, 14 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁶⁴ Churchill to Attlee, 14 August 1942, PREM3/76A/9.
- ⁶⁵ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 14 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁶⁶ Churchill to Attlee, 14 August 1942, PREM3/76A/9; Jacob diary, 13 August 1942.
- ⁶⁷ Harriman note to Churchill, 13 August 1942, PREM3/76/11; Jacob diary, 13 August 1942.
- ⁶⁸ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 14 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁶⁹ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 15 August 1942, FO800/300. Clark Kerr thought Churchill's garment "dreadful," since it resembled mechanics' overalls or a child's romper suit.
- ⁷⁰ Churchill described the food to Wilson as "filthy," Wilson diary, 14 August 1942 in Moran, *Churchill at War*. Some accounts follow Churchill in ignoring his bad mood at the dinner and subsequently. Churchill's account to the War Cabinet glossed over his unhappiness during the dinner, Churchill to Attlee, 15 August 1942, CAB120/67. Gilbert suggests Churchill was depressed by bad news concerning the Malta convoy, and was not angry—Clark Kerr's notes confirm Churchill's bad temper earlier in the day: see note 67.
- ⁷¹ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 15 August 1942, FO800/300; Jacob diary, 14 August 1942. Cadogan had reported to Molotov on the morning of the dinner that Stalin's truculence at the second meeting had had a bad effect, Clark Kerr to FO, 16 August 1942, PREM3/76A/11; Wilson diary, 14 August 1942; Harriman, *Special Envoy*, 161.
- ⁷² Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 14 August 1942, FO800/300; Brooke diary, 14 August 1942; Wilson diary, 14 August 1942.
- ⁷³ Robin Edmonds portrays Clark Kerr as a vain man seeking to gain all the credit, though Clark Kerr's account was never published and he made no capital out of his role. For what it is worth, Clark Kerr's account is verified by John Reed, an official at the Embassy, though Reed may have had the ambassador as his source. Edmonds, *Big Three*, 563 note 15; Reed letter to Lambert (FO), 19 August 1942, FO800/300
- ⁷⁴ Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 15 August 1942, FO800/300; Wilson diary, 15 August 1942. Wilson differs on details with Clark Kerr, but as an account by a Churchill confidant it cannot be discounted as evidence for Churchill's feelings and reactions, despite the efforts of Churchillians to discredit the doctor's viewpoints when they were published and by the fact that Wilson's notes were not strictly speaking a diary, contrary to the way the material is presented in the published version. Leslie Rowan, Churchill's private secretary, writing in the volume refuting Wilson's book, saw Churchill to be deliberately countering Stalin's rudeness; it was "not bad temper, it was a calculated response to a calculated move," Rowan in Wheeler-Bennett, ed., *Action This Day*, 255. On the other hand, Wilson's and Clark Kerr's accounts describe Churchill's bad temper and querulousness on 14 and 15 August in some detail. They have been pointedly overlooked in some accounts of the conference, which is unfortunate, as Wilson and Clark Kerr recorded not only Churchill's mood-swings, which favourably inclined writers might wish to gloss over, but also both his threats to leave prematurely and his musings about Stalin and the prospects for a good relationship with him, which reveal much about Churchill's underlying aims in making the trip. Perhaps the idea that Churchill really thought he could get on terms of personal friendship with Stalin is also an uncomfortable one for Churchill apologists.
- ⁷⁵ Jacob diary, 15 August 1942. From the fact that it was Clark Kerr who contacted Birse, Ross concludes that it was the ambassador, not Jacob, who was responsible for this important change, Ross, "Operation Bracelet," 115; Arthur H. Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter* (London, Michael Joseph, 1967), 94-7.
- ⁷⁶ Carlton describes Churchill's repeated indiscretions within microphone range as "unprofessional," and speculates that some of them, such as his comment that the Russians were "orang-utans," were made while drunk, Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union*, 100.
- ⁷⁷ Clark Kerr, BRACELET diary, 16 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁷⁸ Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, trans. Patricia Johnson McMillan (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 185; Ross, "Operation Bracelet," 115; Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 16 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁷⁹ Birse notes of Churchill-Stalin talks, Kremlin, 7 pm, 15 August 1942, FO800/300.
- ⁸⁰ Soviet record of Stalin-Churchill meeting 15 August 1942, *Советско-английские отношения во время Великой Отечественной Войны* vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdat'yelstvo, 1983), 279 Document 134, Edmonds, *Big Three*, 303.
- ⁸¹ Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 446-449; Churchill to Attlee, 16 August 1942, PREM3/76A/11; Dilks, ed., *Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 473.
- ⁸² Clark Kerr noted, "the P.M. began to chuckle and to kick a pair of gay legs in the air. I can't remember the words he used, but it had all been grand. He had cemented a friendship with Stalin. My God! he was glad that he had come. Stalin had been splendid.... What a pleasure it was to work with 'that great

- man.”” The glee of the P.M. was a pleasure to see. He was like that dog with two cocks.” Clark Kerr, BRACELET journal, 16 August 1942, FO800/300. Clark Kerr adorned his account with a sketch of Churchill naked bar his cigar and a vest which does not fully cover his buttocks or penis, probably the only such drawing of a British prime minister *en deshabillé* in the British official archives.
- ⁸³ Churchill to Attlee, 16 August 1942, PREM3/76A/11.
- ⁸⁴ Jacob diary, 16 August 1942.
- ⁸⁵ Molotov to Maisky, 22 August 1942, “New Documents about Winston Churchill,” 137.
- ⁸⁶ Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 140.
- ⁸⁷ RAF officers went to Moscow later in the year to discuss arrangements for this, code-named Operation VELVET, but the Soviets were never keen, and eventually said they preferred to be supplied with aircraft, not operational squadrons, Kitchen, *British Policy*, 144.
- ⁸⁸ Stalin had not completely got over his suspicions regarding Hess: two months after BRACELET he sent Maisky a splenetic telegram complaining that Churchill was following policies contrary to Soviet interests. He was mainly concerned, it seems, that Churchill’s firm commitment in Moscow to an invasion of France in 1943, was not being translated into plans for action—a concern which, as with Stalin’s warnings of the political problems connected with TORCH, was well-placed. Stalin to Maisky, 19 October 1942, *Советско-английские отношения* vol. 1, 294 Document 147. For his part, Churchill speculated once again on the possibilities of dissension within the Soviet ruling clique, still convinced of Stalin’s sagacity. He wrote to Roosevelt on 24 October 1942, wondering whether anything had happened “inside the Soviet animal to make it impossible for Stalin to give an effective reply” and pondering whether this indicated the Red Army had gained influence, FO954/25B. It is evident from Stalin’s further telegram to Maisky, that he strongly suspected that TORCH would not take place and considered Churchill to be still influenced “by those interested in the Soviet Union’s defeat.” Clearly the test for Stalin was the actual engagement in large-scale operations against the Axis, and his subsequent attitude to co-operation can be mapped against the level of Anglo-American military activity. Stalin to Maisky, 28 October 1942, “New Documents about Winston Churchill,” 138.
- ⁸⁹ Birse, *Memoirs of an Interpreter*, 103.
- ⁹⁰ Churchill to Attlee and War Cabinet, 14 August 1942, FO800/300. David Stone, who generally sees Stalin as a manipulative genius, always cunningly getting his way, suggests Stalin stage-managed these events to set himself off in the best light, but also with the motive of testing the strength and cohesion of the Anglo-American partnership, Stone, *War Summits*, 59, 61. For more on the theory of two or more schools within Soviet foreign policy-making circles, see Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union, 1940-45* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 80-86, and Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, 243-5, part of a perceptive and balanced account of Roosevelt and Churchill’s wartime perceptions of Stalin.
- ⁹¹ Churchill to Stalin, 30 December 1943, Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, 630.
- ⁹² See, however, Jonathan Haslam, “Stalin’s Fears of a Separate Peace, 1942” (*Intelligence and National Security* 8, 1993), 97-9. Cadogan was also convinced Churchill and Stalin had made genuine contact: and attached importance to the fact that Stalin made no veiled threats about a separate peace, indeed he emphasised the determination of his people to fight on, Dilks, ed., *Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 474.
- ⁹³ Clark Kerr to Cadogan, 21 August 1942, PREM3/76A/10. For the “inferiority complex” idea, see Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, 78, 97-9.
- ⁹⁴ Martin H. Folly, “Friends—of a Kind: America and Its Allies in the Second World War” (*Journal of American Studies* 40.3, 2006), 633-44.