

1975

## Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence

John B. Bonds  
*U.S. Navy*

Francis L. Loewenheim

Harold D. Langley

Manfred Jonas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bonds, John B.; Loewenheim, Francis L.; Langley, Harold D.; and Jonas, Manfred (1975) "Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 28 : No. 4 , Article 14.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol28/iss4/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

account proves once again that reading and books can be both informative and fun.

B.M. SIMPSON III  
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

— ψ —

Loewenheim, Francis L., Langley, Harold D., and Jonas, Manfred, ed., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*. New York: Dutton, 1975. 709pp.

"The Essence of an Alliance" would be an equal and appropriate title for this book for the unique relationship between the two Western leaders emerges more clearly and in better focus here than in any other treatment of the period. The messages sent to and fro across the Atlantic tell a tale familiar to students and buffs of the period, but here, highlighted by superb summaries of the events surrounding them, the images take on a depth and flavor usually lacking in a collection of correspondence.

The linkage between Roosevelt and Churchill seems to have been a special blend of role and personality. In most cases, personality was subordinate to the demands of the situation, but when differences arose between the men, it was an appeal to personality which invariably provided the necessary catalyst for solution.

Although the documents themselves pose few surprises, the richness of the early correspondence between the American President and the then First Lord of the Admiralty is truly interesting. The "measures short of war" can be traced from conception to execution in the messages, and the middle period, after America had declared war, was an exercise in problem solving which both men obviously relished. The objective was simply (if imprecisely) defined, and the means were expanding rapidly. The locus of the correspondence relative to strategy was the question "when?" rather than "whether?" FDR was

anxious to get American troops engaged before the congressional election of 1942 or as soon thereafter as possible. Consequently, the British veto of the cross-channel operation in 1942 almost dictated the North Africa venture, with the subsequent further delay of OVERLORD until 1944. The logic of that decision is very clearly presented in the exchange of cables of early 1942.

Although the entire substance of the book is fascinating, the latter years of the war will be of particular interest to most readers of this review. The deteriorating relationships between the Eastern and Western flanks of the Grand Alliance emerge plainly in the correspondence of 1944 and 1945. As the war's outcome became more and more assured, the problems amenable to easy, technical solution disappeared. In their place emerged conundrums of perception, ethics, and legality. Where personality had smoothed the path of accommodation between Roosevelt and Churchill in their difficult moments, similar attempts with Stalin failed abjectly. Communications between the Allies even seemed to exacerbate the political differences which existed, as words and phrases evoked unfavorable connotations on both sides. Disagreements between Churchill and Roosevelt did not disappear in these months, of course, and the method in which they were resolved provide a marked contrast which is useful for comparison. Again, the appeals to commonly held values and the existing reservoir of mutual respect softened the dissonances. Perhaps between FDR and Churchill, the Western norm of compromise was the key, a norm that Stalin simply did not share. He conceded what was required by the situation at hand, on a quid pro quo basis if possible, but the concept of a Western politician's "implicit logroll" was totally foreign to him.

In the end, as the last days of his life were played out, FDR's policy toward the Soviets began to harden. In direct

## 92 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

contravention of much revisionist history, the reader of this correspondence is left with little doubt that an East-West confrontation was almost inevitable by early 1945. The documentary evidence here suggests that FDR would have taken the firm position adopted by his successor, once the war was over.

This extraordinary collection of messages provides a valid counterpoint to the bureaucratic politics model so popular these days. These men may not have been ideal "rational national actors," but they clearly conceived of

their roles as such, and the cables document their unitary actions. Churchill observed that "when the war of the giants is over, the wars of the pygmies will begin." After reading their correspondence, one is convinced that these two men were indeed giants of their time, and as such were masters, not subjects, of organizational and bureaucratic politics. It was a time for heroes, and the West was indeed fortunate.

JOHN B. BONDS  
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

————— ψ —————