

# LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 28, No. 2 - Summer 1982

Editor of this issue: Antanas Klimas

ISSN 0024-5089

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## WORLD WAR II RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS AND THE BALTIC STATES: A TEST CASE

EDMUND R. PADVAISKAS

Siena College

From the day when the peoples of these [Baltic] Republics first gained their independent and democratic form of government the people of the United States have watched their admirable progress in self-government with deep and sympathetic interest.

The policy of this Government is universally known. The people of the United States are opposed to predatory activities no matter whether they are carried on by the use of force or the threat of force. They are likewise opposed to any form of intervention on the part of one State, however powerful, in the domestic concerns of any other Sovereign State, however weak.

The United States will continue to stand by these principles, because the conviction of the American people that unless the doctrine in which these principles are inherent once again governs relations between nations, the rule of reason, of justice, and of law — in other words the basis of modern civilization itself — cannot be preserved.<sup>1</sup>

Acting Secretary of State Sumner Wells  
on the Soviet annexation of the  
Baltic States, July, 1940

This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

Stalin to Tito and Djilas,  
April, 1945

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, ancient nations but new states in the inter-war period, were invaded and forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. The United States and other Western governments refused to recognize the legality of the Soviet action which was followed by arrests, murder, and deportation into forced labor camps of tens of thousands of the Baltic population.<sup>3</sup> After the June, 1941 German attack on the U.S.S.R., the Soviet Union became an ally of Britain and soon of the United States. Among the first demands Stalin made to his new friends were that they recognize the June 1941 frontiers. The Baltic States thus became an early test case of Russian-Western relations. It was a relatively minor phase of World War II diplomacy soon to be overshadowed by other great divisive issues such as the Polish Question and the future of Germany. Nevertheless the Baltic case is perhaps instructive as a very early example of Soviet war-aims, tactics, and negotiating techniques and the American response to them. The initial high-minded Wilsonian idealism of the American leaders would quickly be sacrificed to the exigencies of *Realpolitik*.

American war-aims were established very early in the conflict. Even before 7 December 1941, the United States was deeply involved in the European War, giving Britain all aid short of actual military involvement. In order to clarify the principles for which they stood — in effect war-aims — Roosevelt and Churchill at their first meeting in August 1941 issued a document that became known as the Atlantic Charter.

The first three articles announced that

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the fully expressed wishes of the people concerned;

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them . . . [4](#)

The Atlantic Charter reflected the strong strain of Wilsonian idealism existing among senior American diplomats. Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, was a veteran Tennessee politician brought into the State Department by President Roosevelt for the influence he exerted in the Congress. Hull was an old-fashioned Jeffersonian liberal who remembered the problems Wilson had in 1919 when confronted with the secret treaties of the Allies. Hull would adamantly oppose any secret deals while the war was still in progress. He would strive mightily for an international organization that could maintain the peace after the war. The Under-Secretary, Sumner Wells, ex-Groton and Harvard like Roosevelt and his personal friend, was also strongly committed to an America which stood for the highest principles in the world arena. Adolph Berle, an Assistant Secretary of State, a New Deal Brain Trustee, was vociferous in his adherence to the rights of all nations large or small. The career officers in the European Division of the State Department were likewise ready to defend the ideas of open covenants and a world based on law and justice. They were suspicious both of British Imperialism and of Soviet expansionism. They disliked the traditional European system of balance of power, spheres of influence, and Great Power politics. The American Diplomatic Establishment, therefore, seeking to profit by the mistakes of the 1919 peacemaking, imbued with Wilsonian idealism, and suspicious of Old World diplomacy, prepared to do diplomatic battle for adherence to democratic principles.[5](#)

The President, however, ultimately determined the foreign policy of the country. Franklin Roosevelt's views were more complicated and ambivalent. He was of the generation, like his senior advisers, that witnessed the frustration and failure of Woodrow Wilson's attempt to secure world peace. He was also aware of and responsive to American public opinion: the native distrust of foreign entanglements, the genuine conviction about the efficacy of democracy. Roosevelt, however, was also an experienced politician, and give and take, compromise, the bargain and deal were the very stuff of American politics. The President believed in the American ideal of a world based on democracy and justice, but he was prepared to achieve these by the traditional methods of Great Power politics. The "Four Policemen" would somehow establish and secure a democratic world. Roosevelt was ready to trade and deal, to make concessions to achieve his aims. His approach therefore would be ambivalent. He would speak in the rhetoric of Wilson but would not hesitate to follow the advice of Machiavelli. He was both the "Lion and the Fox" and "the Soldier of Freedom."[6](#) Roosevelt, furthermore, like many great men was an egotist, supremely confident of his skills as a negotiator, of his personal charm, proud of this proven track record as the master American politician. The product of an affluent and famous family, of exclusive and elite schools, he nevertheless reveled in the rough and tumble of Democratic Party politics. He would be eager to match his skills with his contemporaries on the world scene.[7](#)

As the United States early announced the principles for which it would wage war, so too did the U.S.S.R. The Soviet minimum war-aims were clearly, explicitly, unambiguously stated and consistently adhered to; the frontiers of 22 June 1941, that is, the fruits of their bargain with the Nazis. These territories included a strip of Finland, Bessarabia, Eastern Poland, and the Baltic States. The sources reveal Stalin's intentions very early and show his skill and toughness as a negotiator.

Stalin and his people were of course products of a much different background and circumstance than the American with whom they would bargain and deal. On his record and career, Stalin showed at different times utter ruthlessness and cautious prudence, despicable immorality and a kind of rough affability. He was the author of a crude version of Marxism and became an exponent of Russian nationalist power. Stalin was a survivor of the Bolshevik underground and tsarist prisons, the formidable victor in the power struggle and purge, the killer of Trotsky, Bukharin, and literally millions of others. Above all he understood power, how to seize, retain, and wield it. This was a different school than Groton or Harvard, and his political experience involved something more than defeating Republican ward bosses or presidential contenders. Stalin's aims in general were to retain his own power and that of his Party, to achieve security by expanding the Soviet state into East Central Europe, to emerge after the war as a recognized Great Power and as the sole base for the "Socialist" revolution.[8](#)

Besides Stalin, the American diplomats would deal principally with Foreign Commissar V. M. Molotov. He was Stalin's creature, dour and taciturn and so inflexible and tenacious in negotiation that he earned the nickname of "old iron-pants." The various ambassadors to the United States in this period, Ousmansky, Litvinov, and young Gromyko, were minor actors on the scene with no influence on their master.

The Russians showed their hand very early in the war during the Eden mission to Moscow, 16-20 December, 1941. The British War Cabinet on 4 December, 1941, decided to send the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, to Moscow to try to assuage the Russians, who, surly and suspicious of British intentions, were exerting pressure for a more detailed military and political alliance. The Eden mission is significant in revealing so early in the war in clear and unmistakable terms the Soviet war-aims. Informed of the trip and its purpose, Winant, the American Ambassador to Britain, cabled Hull. The State Department experts in the European Division, suspecting a Soviet attempt to secure recognition of the 1941 frontiers,

drafted instructions to Winant. These were approved by Hull and the President and made clear the firm American adherence to the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the opposition to any political settlement while the war continued.<sup>9</sup>

When Eden left for Moscow on 7 December, 1941,<sup>10</sup> he was under some constraints. He could not commit his Government without prior consultation with the United States. Eden had four sessions with Stalin and became the first important Western statesman to experience the Stalinist style of diplomacy. In the Kremlin, with the battle of Moscow and the possible survival of Russia still to be decided, with German troops still fiercely fighting only fifty miles from the capital, Eden found Stalin calmly prepared to discuss the post-war world. In four late evening and night meetings, amidst tea and cakes, brandy and zakuska, Stalin, "a quiet dictator in his manner; friendly with no shouting or gesticulation," was ready to divide Europe with the British. Eden's hope that the Russians would accept a generally worded accord vanished. "Russian ideas were already starkly definite. They changed little during the next three years, for their purpose was to secure the most tangible physical guarantees for Russia's future security."<sup>11</sup>

Stalin handed Eden the drafts of a military and a political treaty, both innocuous in nature. Attached to the political treaty, however, was a "secret protocol" defining Soviet war-aims. Germany was to be dismembered with the Rhineland and Bavaria detached, the frontiers with Finland and Rumania would be those of 1941, Poland would expand westward at German expense with the "Curzon line" the Soviet boundary. The Soviets "would recover" the Baltic States. Stalin graciously permitted the British to have bases in Denmark, Norway, and Belgium. He would not insist on settling the Polish frontier immediately. "What I am most interested in is the position in Finland and the Baltic States and in Rumania."<sup>12</sup> Eden could do little to satisfy Stalin's territorial demands. The United States had made it clear it would approve no secret deals.

When the talks resumed the next day at midnight, the geniality of the first session vanished. "Stalin began to show his claws," demanding immediate recognition of the 1941 frontiers, particularly the inclusion of the Baltic States and the strip of Finland. When Eden demurred Stalin insisted. "Is it really necessary on this question of the Baltic States to have a Government decision? Surely this is absolutely axiomatic ... All we ask for is to restore our country to its former frontiers." Stalin professed to be "surprised and amazed" at the British Government on this matter. When Eden pleaded the Atlantic Charter, Stalin's reply was: "I thought that the Atlantic Charter was directed against those people who were trying to establish world dominion. It now looks as if the Atlantic Charter was directed against the U.S.S.R."<sup>13</sup> The argument continued at length with no result. The same was true of the next day's talks. The British, now irritated by the Russians' unreasonable attitude, decided on a ruse. Cripps, the British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and Cadogan, the Permanent Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, would deliberately complain in their hotel room, expecting the room to be bugged. The Russians would then realize the British displeasure. The atmosphere did in fact improve, and in the last meeting on the 20th Stalin was more conciliatory. He still insisted on the 1941 frontiers, but recognized the necessity of the British consulting the United States Government. The Anglo-Soviet treaty could be signed later. Then, after a banquet of "vodka, caviar, borsch, sturgeon, suckling pig, wines and champagnes" that "was embarrassingly sumptuous,"<sup>14</sup> Eden left Moscow. The Russians had now shown their hand and waited for the Western response.

When Eden in a telegram to Churchill, who was visiting the United States, suggested that perhaps the principles of the Atlantic Charter need not be applied to the 1941 frontiers, the Prime Minister's reply was full of Churchillian indignation: "Stalin's demands about Finland, Baltic States and Rumania are directly contrary to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Articles of the Atlantic Charter to which Stalin has subscribed. There can be no question whatever of our making such an agreement, secret, or public, direct or implied, without prior agreement with the United States.

The time has not yet come to settle frontier questions, which can only be resolved at the Peace Conference when we have won the war. 2. The mere desire to have an agreement [with the Russians] should never lead us into making wrongful promises. Foreign Secretary has acquitted himself admirably, and should not be downhearted if he has to leave Moscow without a flourish of trumpets."<sup>15</sup>

The British dilemma, however, was to find some way to reconcile two powerful allies. As Eden put it in his report to the War Cabinet: "Soviet policy is amoral; United States policy is exaggeratedly moral, at least where non-American interests are concerned . . . The question of the Baltic States is the first example of this conflict of principle between the United States and the Soviet Government."<sup>16</sup>

What followed was a lengthy diplomatic duel which lasted from January to May 1942. The British, under intense pressure from the Russians to sign a treaty recognizing the 1941 frontiers, whose diplomats remembered that the failure in 1939 to cede these same Baltic States led to the Nazi-Soviet pact, who were fearful of a separate Russian peace, were ready to accommodate Stalin to preserve the alliance. The Americans during this entire period took their stand on the principles of the Atlantic Charter and refused to give way.

The American position was formulated in a long memorandum Hull sent to the President on 4 February, 1942. Eden had kept Winant, the American Ambassador, fully informed of his Moscow trip, even giving him his notes and papers. Winant, in a series of cables in January, reported to the State Department where Dunn, the Political Adviser on European Affairs, and Roy Atherton headed an intensive study, the result of which was Hull's memorandum.<sup>17</sup>

The memorandum carefully reviewed the Eden mission, accurately assessed the Soviet demands, indicated the British willingness to compromise on the Baltic States, and in strong terms reaffirmed the original American position "not to recognize any territorial changes which have been made in European frontiers since the outbreak of World War and not to enter into any commitments of a territorial nature in Europe which might hamper the proceedings of the postwar Peace Conference." The State Department pointed out that if concessions were made on this issue, it would be difficult to resist further Soviet demands relating to frontiers, territory, or spheres of influence that would certainly follow once the Soviet Union was in a favorable bargaining position. Hull and the State Department expected that Stalin would exert all kinds of pressure to attain immediate recognition of the fruits of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Recognition by the United States and Britain would mean among other things justification for the Soviet invasion of the Baltic States, Poland, and Finland. The memorandum warned of the effect American assent to Soviet territorial demands would have on the attitude of small countries everywhere. It would betray the "high principles of international conduct" advocated by the United States. It would also disturb the Latin American Republics and the Vatican.[18](#)

Above all "the recognition at this time of Soviet claims to the Baltic States would be certain to have an effect upon the integrity of the Atlantic Charter. The Soviet Union and the British Government must not be permitted to argue that the Baltic States willingly and freely chose annexation to the U.S.S.R. "It must be clear to all intelligent people who take the trouble to look into the matter that the Baltic States were invaded by Soviet armed forces and that the population of these States at no time had an opportunity freely to express their desires as to whether or not they would like to remain independent." Moreover, if the Soviet invasion of the Baltic States and the rigged plebiscites that followed should be accepted as a model for ascertaining the wishes of other peoples, it would be a precedent that "would destroy the meaning of one of the most important clauses of the Atlantic Charter and would tend to undermine the force of the whole document."[19](#)

The attitude of the American Government in January and February 1942 to the Soviet demand for recognition of the absorption of the Baltic States therefore remained unequivocal: no recognition, no territorial concessions, no diminution of the principles of the Atlantic Charter. The British, however, prodded by the busy and insistent Maisky, were now prepared to concede to Stalin's demands. In the middle of February the Foreign Office and War Cabinet had worked out some proposals and Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, was instructed to try to convince the Americans.[20](#)

Halifax met with Roosevelt on the 19th of February and then twice with Wells, the Under Secretary of State. Halifax was one of those British diplomats who from the beginning believed that the Baltic States should not be permitted to disrupt the alliance with Russia. He showed Wells the Foreign Office dispatch which argued that "Stalin's demand is put to us as a test of the sincerity of our avowed desire to work with him during and after the war." The Foreign Office suggested two alternatives to a complete Soviet takeover of the Baltic Republics. The Soviet Union could be granted the right to establish military bases in the Baltic States or it could be permitted to exercise control over defense and foreign policy matters. These plans might reconcile the Soviet demand for security and the now troublesome Atlantic Charter principles of non-intervention and national self-determination. Stalin might agree, especially if it was a joint British-American offer. To prevent this concession from standing as a precedent there would be a quid pro quo: the Soviet Government would have to reaffirm the Atlantic Charter; permit confederations of Central European States; cooperate with Britain and the U.S. in rehabilitating other States after the war.[21](#)

Halifax also indicated to Wells that Roosevelt on his own initiative had suggested an idea similar to the British second alternative, i.e., Soviet control of defense and foreign affairs. The Foreign Office dispatch further pointed out that the support of the Soviet Union was crucial both during the war and after, that the Russians could indeed have demanded much more, e.g., the Dardanelles, Balkans, Curzon line, access to the Persian Gulf and Norwegian waters. Moreover, from the strategic point of view, Russian power in the Baltic would mean security against Germany. Halifax requested Wells's response to the ideas of the Foreign Office.[22](#)

Wells, a leading Wilsonian, who had helped draft the Atlantic Charter, gave Halifax no satisfaction. He asserted that this was the most important political issue that had arisen since the war. The British and American governments were at a crossroads and would have to decide whether they would live up to the principles of the Atlantic Charter. The idea of giving the Russians control over military and foreign affairs in the Baltic States was a complete repudiation of those principles. The Soviet Government should certainly have security, but not "if that implied the placing of millions of human beings under Russian domination should those human beings desire to maintain their own independence and be bitterly opposed to Russian overlordship." How, Wells asked, could any healthy world order be created in the future "on a foundation which implied the utter ignoring of all the principles of independence, liberty, and self-determination which were set forth in the Atlantic Charter?" When Halifax, in reply, spoke of the necessity of Russia acting as a balance to Germany, Wells characterized this as "the worst phase of the Munich spirit." He reasserted the position that this was a question of vital principle. What kind of peace would be possible if the British and American governments at this early stage "agreed upon selling out millions of people who looked to us as their one hope in the future and if that new world order were based upon the domination of unwilling, resentful, and potent minorities by a State to which they would never give willing allegiance"?

[23](#) What the British Ambassador thought of this high-minded, moralistic homily is not recorded. Two days later, however, he was again called in to see Wells, who meanwhile had discussed the matter with Roosevelt. Halifax was informed that the President believed the British attitude to be "provincial" and that no secret agreement guaranteeing Soviet frontiers could be discussed until the war was finished. The President believed that the Russian desire for security could be met in



other ways and that he would personally discuss the matter with Stalin directly. Halifax, taken aback, reiterated his old arguments and suggested his frustration with these minor Baltic States. They were not very successful governments, he asserted, when they were free, and they had been after all part of Imperial Russia for over one hundred years. When Wells pointed out the irrelevance of this, Halifax said that he might be thought to be cynical, "but that weighing the two in the balance, he did not feel that the enjoyment of self-government by the Baltic peoples could be compared in importance to the assurances that the Soviet Union would loyally continue until after the war, and even more important after the war." The British diplomat did not think the Americans were "realistic." Wells refused to accept the argument, reaffirmed his belief in ideals and principles, and furthermore asserted that Roosevelt and Churchill could never "secretly and in some devious fashion now utterly contravene the most sacred principles of all set forth in the Atlantic Charter," the right of people to liberty and self-determination. If the American public learned of these British and Russian proposals, it would regard them "as a shameful violation" of one of the American war-aims.[24](#)

By late February and March the British were suggesting in polite diplomatic language that the American cousins were blundering again and there was concern over Roosevelt's initiating direct talks with Stalin. The British, given the bleak military situation, still worried over a separate German-Soviet peace.[25](#) Maisky continued his pressure,[26](#) and American diplomats learned that Cripps privately sought to win over a number of MP's to the idea of recognizing the 1941 Soviet frontiers.[27](#) Churchill himself, who had strongly admonished Eden about concessions in January, 1941, now reversed his position: "The increasing gravity of the war has led me to feel that the principles of the Atlantic Charter ought not to be construed so as to deny Russia the frontiers she occupied when Germany attacked her."[28](#) When Roosevelt sought to intervene in the matter by discussion with Litvinov, the Soviet reply was succinctly unencouraging: "The Soviet Government has taken note of the President's view." Maisky told Winant that the United States should stay out of the affair and indicated to the British that the Soviet Government at this time sought not recognition of all the 1941 frontiers but only the Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic States.[29](#) At the end of March Eden made it explicitly clear that the War Cabinet felt compelled to grant Stalin's demands as a way to secure his trust. This was a "substitute for military assistance" to the Soviet Union which the British could not give. The Americans were warned that the Churchill Government could fall over this issue and be replaced with the pro-Soviet Cripps as Prime Minister. What the British now requested was not American approval but silent acceptance of Stalin's demands.[30](#) Halifax was instructed to seek an interview with Roosevelt to discuss these issues.

On 1 April Halifax was informed by Acting Secretary Wells that the President would not see him on this matter since he had fully expressed his views. Wells, however, now offered Halifax a suggestion from Roosevelt. If provisions were added to the proposed Anglo-Soviet treaty which would permit Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians to leave with their properties the territories the Soviets would annex, such stipulations would be more in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter and more palatable to American public opinion.[31](#) Halifax at once communicated to his Government what seemed to be an American willingness tacitly to accept a treaty with some cosmetic concessions to American sensibilities and public opinion.

When, however, this idea of permitting mass exile for the Baltic peoples circulated within the State Department, it was immediately challenged and condemned.[32](#) Adolph Berle felt compelled to send a memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State. This document represents perhaps the most outspoken and passionate commitment to defend the rights of small nations under principles of the Atlantic Charter. Berle noted the "almost frantic pressure" by the British to secure American acquiescence. He reminded Wells that the American Government was bound by the Atlantic Charter to restore the independence of peoples conquered by force and that "we have not been unmindful of the extreme and unjust hardship of the fate which the Baltic Republics would suffer if their entire national life were submerged, either by Russia or by Germany."[33](#) Berle understood and recognized the legitimate interests of Russia in the Baltic States. The Soviet Government could not permit these countries to serve as springboards for invasion, and the Soviet Union should have access to the Baltic Sea. Berle, who had been involved in the new Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America, suggested a relationship between the U.S.S.R. and the Baltic States which could be analogous to that between the United States and the Central American Republics. This latter relationship, Berle believed, protected the economic and military interests of the United States and still permitted the people their independence. He then forcefully condemned the suggestion the Baltic peoples be allowed to emigrate. Where could they go, for one thing, and more importantly, Berle feared that if the United States approved this, then it "would have committed [itself] to the seizure of the territory, provided there is added some pious, and in the existing circumstances, meaningless phrase about free immigration of populations to places unknown, on conditions unspecified, and in any case, with the complete sacrifice of their tradition, their property, their habits, and possibly even their language and race." This agreement would become known as a "Baltic Munich." Instead Berle preferred "a blunt and frank statement of our views, full willingness to assume the satisfaction of every Russian interest consistent with the maintenance of the cultural and racial existence in their homelands of three free, decent, unambitious, and hard-working peoples who are now apparently to be eliminated from the earth."[34](#)

Wells at once replied, completely agreeing with Berle. "In my own judgement the treaty violated the clear terms of the Atlantic Charter and is indefensible from every moral standpoint and equally indefensible from the standpoint of the future peace and stability of Europe." President Roosevelt, Wells said, was also utterly opposed. The suggestion about emigration was meant to prevent the enslavement if the event came to pass. Wells protested that he personally felt more strongly over this issue than any other matter before him in recent years. He believed the proposed British action to be not only morally indefensible "but likewise extraordinarily stupid." Wells believed that once Soviet demands were met new ones would follow for the Bukovina, Bessarabia, Eastern Poland.[35](#)

Throughout April, the British continued discussions with Maisky, worked on the draft of an Anglo-Soviet treaty, and prepared for the final negotiations which would, on the Russian side, be led by Soviet Commissar of Foreign Relations Molotov. Roosevelt was now pursuing his idea of satisfying Russian suspicions about the Western Governments by offering a military proposal to relieve the Russian critical western front.<sup>36</sup> The Russians from the beginning had stridently insisted on a "second front," American/British landings in force in Western Europe.

After some delay Molotov arrived in London and on 21 May began final negotiations for a treaty that would recognize the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic States and a strip of Finland. When Winant informed the State Department of these plans, Hull at once drew up a memorandum for the President "even stronger than the one of February 4." It bluntly condemned the proposed treaty and threatened to issue a public statement asserting that the United States Government "did not subscribe to its principles and clauses." Hull sent the memorandum to Roosevelt with some apprehension because of its blunt and strong language. Roosevelt, however, Hull writes, "quickly returned it with his OK." Instructions were then sent to Winant, who was to convey the American position to Molotov.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile in London the negotiations were proving to be sticky. Molotov raised a number of new issues, rejected the idea of any emigration, made reference to the Polish frontier, and indicated a desire for a secret agreement on Russian claims to Finland and Rumania. Eden, despairing of agreement, proposed an alternative treaty of simple alliance which did not mention frontiers. The Russians then dropped the new demands and it seemed that a treaty recognizing the Soviet claim to the Baltic States would be signed.<sup>38</sup> Winant now was able to see Molotov and Maisky and conveyed to them the substance of Hull's memorandum. "They listened with great attention and Molotov told me that the President's position on this question was a matter of serious consideration." Molotov then asked Winant's opinion of Eden's substitute treaty. Winant indicated that he helped draft it.<sup>39</sup> The next day, the 25th of May, Molotov informed Eden he was convinced that there would be serious objections in the United States to a frontier treaty and that he would recommend to Moscow the Eden substitute. On the 26th Stalin approved and a simple treaty of alliance was signed without any reference to the Baltic States. The Wilsonians in the United States seemed to have won. Molotov next visited the United States. Arriving in Washington with his chunk of black bread, roll of sausage, and pistol, the Soviet Foreign Commissar now sought what Roosevelt seemed to be hinting at: an American commitment to a second front. After several meetings in which Molotov listened to Roosevelt's rambling discourses, the Russian pressed for an answer and seemed to get what he wished. "The President authorized," reads the interpreter's notes, "Mr. Molotov to inform Mr. Stalin that we expect the formation of a second front this year."<sup>40</sup>

The Spring of 1942 was the high tide of the American resistance to Russian demands for the Baltic States which the British perceived to be the "acid test" of Soviet relations with the West. Despite frantic pressure by the British and the Russians, the United States continued to insist that the principles of the Atlantic Charter must protect even small nations. Hull, Wells, Berle, the professionals in the State Department all were fiercely high-minded and the President supported this view. In the end the approach was successful. Molotov agreed on a treaty of alliance with no mention of the Baltic States. The Russians seemed to respond to the American threat of public condemnation and to the American promise of a second front in 1942.

Roosevelt, however, could not deliver on his promise for an immediate invasion of Europe to relieve the German pressure on the Russians. By the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 the tide of war shifted finally in favor of the Allies with victories in the North African desert and at Stalingrad. Roosevelt began to consider more specifically the shape of the post-war world. He believed good relations with the Soviet Union were essential for the post-war political system.

The President early in 1943 abandoned the fight over the Baltic States as Anthony Eden among others soon learned. The British Foreign Secretary visited Washington in March of 1943. In a long conversation with Roosevelt the subject of the Baltic States arose. When Eden told the President the Russians intended to absorb the Baltic States after the war, Roosevelt replied that American public opinion would be opposed to this. He assumed, however, that the Soviet Union would be in control of those countries after the war and "that none of us can force them to get out." Roosevelt hoped only that the Russians would go through the motions of holding a plebiscite. The President suggested that an Anglo-American agreement to recognize Soviet control over the Baltic Republics could be used "as a bargaining instrument in getting other concessions from Russia."<sup>41</sup> For Roosevelt it had thus come to this. The Russian demand for recognition of the conquest of the Baltic States, so fervently resisted since 1940, would now be accepted. These countries were now useful only as bargaining chips. The President revealed his thinking about this question to another visitor in 1943. Averell Harriman, the newly appointed Ambassador to the Soviet Union was informed over lunch about the approach Roosevelt would take in the forthcoming talks with Stalin. The President made it clear that he would negotiate with Stalin personally matters like the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. Although Russia had the power to take what it wanted, he hoped to dissuade Stalin from unilateral action. "He had the idea that he could explain to Stalin the world reaction he could expect from decent behavior on the part of the Russians . . ." Roosevelt could offer Stalin recognition of the Soviet Union as a Great Power, support for Russian security needs, aid in post-war recognition, and even internationalization of the Persian Railroad to give the "Soviet Union assured access the the Persian Gulf." "Roosevelt added that he hoped to persuade Stalin to grant the population of the Baltic States the right to approve or disapprove any territorial changes through plebiscites, to be held within two or three years after the reoccupation by the Russians" and the right of the people to emigrate.<sup>42</sup>

Roosevelt was now very eager for his first meeting with Stalin and wanted no interference from the State Department. Hull, the Secretary of State, would not even be permitted to attend. Sumner Wells, the Under Secretary of State, resigned in September, 1943. It was over continual personal clashes with Hull, and the resignation was accepted by Roosevelt with regret. But Wells's absence meant a strong defender of the Atlantic Charter would no longer be involved in formulation of policy. Eden and Churchill were told that the United States representatives to the Moscow Conference which was to prepare for Teheran would be instructed not to discuss the Baltic States if the Russians raised that question. The British could see no value in this, but Roosevelt wanted now to personally exercise his negotiating skills with Stalin.<sup>43</sup> At the Teheran Conference, 28 November — 1 December, 1943, he finally had his chance.

At Teheran Roosevelt went to extraordinary lengths to ingratiate himself with Stalin. He willingly accepted quarters in the Soviet Embassy, deliberately refused any private meeting with Churchill, teased the British Prime Minister to amuse Stalin, and strongly supported the cross-channel invasion desired by the Russians. He also engaged in two private discussions with Stalin with only Bohlen, acting as interpreter, present. After the military talks were concluded the last day — 1 December — was devoted to an eight-hour marathon session to draft final communiques and to discuss political issues. In the midst of this day, Roosevelt requested another private session with Stalin.<sup>44</sup>

The session was extraordinary in that after a long struggle throughout 1942 against recognition of territory the Soviet Union seized by force, Roosevelt would now accede to the Soviet territorial demands. He would do so without being asked, without even seeking a quid pro quo except that of obtaining Stalin's friendship and good will for the future. Roosevelt explained to Stalin that he wished to discuss frankly with him a matter of internal American politics. He accepted the Russian design for a Poland which would lose its eastern regions to the Soviet Union and be compensated with German territory. However, there were six or seven million voters of Polish extraction and he did not wish to lose their vote, Roosevelt hoped therefore Stalin would understand that he could not publicly participate in any arrangement of the Polish frontiers at the present time. The grizzled Bolshevik leader whose contempt for the bourgeois democratic process was no secret must have puzzled a bit over the peculiarities of American politics. But delighted at being handed the Curzon line, Stalin graciously replied to Roosevelt "that now that the President explained, he understood."<sup>45</sup>

Having disposed of Poland, Roosevelt now washed his hands of the Baltic States. He went on to say that there were also persons of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian origin in the United States. He realized that the Baltic Republics had once been part of Russia and "added jokingly" that he would not go to war with the Soviet Union after it re-occupied these lands. The problem was American public opinion, which would like to see evidence of the right of self-determination. Indeed, "world opinion would want some expression of the will of the people, perhaps not immediately after their re-occupation by Soviet forces, but some day, and that he was personally confident that the people would vote to join the Soviet Union."<sup>46</sup>

The only thing Roosevelt wanted from Stalin was that he mouth some pious platitudes to ease the President's conscience or at least concern for possible lost votes. Stalin would not buy it. He was at least consistent and honest. The Soviet leader replied that the Baltic States had no autonomy under the tsar and no one in the United States or Britain had then raised questions of public opinion. He did not see, therefore, why it was now raised. Bohlen's notes next read: "The President: 'The truth of the matter was that the public neither knew nor understood'; Marshall Stalin: 'They would be informed and some propaganda work be done.' " The most Stalin would say was that although there could be no international supervision, the Baltic peoples would be granted many opportunities to express their will "in accord with the Soviet Constitution." Roosevelt asked, almost plaintively, for at least one little personal favor. ". . . it would be helpful to him personally if some public declaration in regard to future elections to which the Marshall had referred, could be made."<sup>47</sup> Stalin would grant not even this. Roosevelt did not insist any more. So the matter ended. The Baltic States were no longer an issue.

The Russians, very early in the war, made the Baltic States a test case. After resisting Soviet demands on the grounds of the Atlantic Charter, American leaders came to believe that if the minimum concessions were granted, the Russians would be satisfied and would work for a peaceful and democratic world. If the Baltic States were indeed a test, it might not be unfair to say that the United States failed the test.

1 United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1940. General*. Vol. I (Washington, 1959), pp. 401-02. Henceforth the State Department papers will be cited: *FRUS*.

2 Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962), p. 114.

3 For the Soviet actions against the Baltic States see: *FRUS: The Soviet Union 1939-1940* (Washington, 1952), pp. 934-84; and *FRUS, 1940* (Washington, 1952), Vol. I, 351-444.

4 The record of the conference held at sea between 9 and 12 August, 1941, may be found in *FRUS, 1941* (Washington, 1958), Vol. I, pp. 341-78) for the text of the Atlantic Charter, pp. 368-69.

5 *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York, 1948); Sumner Wells, *The Time for Decision* (New York, 1944); Beatrice A. Berle and Jacob B. Travis, eds., *Navigating the Rapids, 1918-1971, From the Papers of Adolph A. Berle* (New York, 1973); for a discussion of the State Department views on the Soviet Union see Daniel Yegrin, *Shattered Peace* (Boston, 1957), pp. 3-41.

6 These are the titles of James M. Burns's two volume biography of Roosevelt.

7 Roosevelt's foreign policy is treated extensively in James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt, the Soldier of Freedom, 1940-1945* (New York, 1970); and Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York, 1979); see also Robert A. Divne, *Roosevelt and World War II* (Baltimore, 1970).

8 Insights into Stalin's life, character, and motives are provided by: Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin. The Man and His Era* (New York, 1973); Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge* (New York, 1972); Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962); Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York, 1967); foreign policy is detailed in, Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York, 1968).

9 Hull was blunt: ". . . no commitments as to individual countries must be entered into at this time . . . Above all there must be no secret accords." Hull to Winant, December 5, 1941, *FRUS, 1941* (Washington, 1958), Vol. I, p. 194. Eden had heard this line before in July, 1941, from Hopkins and Winant and was none too pleased: ". . . the spectacle of an American President talking at large on European frontiers chilled me with Wilsonian memories." *The Reckoning: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon* (Boston, 1965), p. 316.

10 Eden describes his trip in, *The Reckoning*, pp. 328-52; Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador to Britain, accompanied Eden. His account is Ivan Maisky, *Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador* (New York, 1968), pp. 217-42; Eden's notes of the discussions and other materials were given to Winant and are recorded in *FRUS, 1942* (Washington, 1961), Vol. III, pp. 494-505.

11 Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 335.

12 *FRUS, 1942*, III, p. 495.

13 Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 343; *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 501-02.

14 Eden, *The Reckoning*, pp. 350-52.

15 Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (New York, 1968), p. 531.

16 Eden, *The Reckoning*, pp. 370-71.

17 Hull, *Memoirs*, p. 1170.

18 *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 505-510.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 510-12.

20 Eden, *The Reckoning*, pp. 371-72.

21 Memorandum of Conversation, Under Secretary of State Wells, February 18, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 512-17; Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 375.

22 *FRUS, 1942*, III, 517-19.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 519-20.

24 Memorandum of Conversation, Under Secretary of State Wells, February 20, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 521-26.

25 Aide Memoire by the British Foreign Office, 25 February, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 524-26.

26 Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 375.

27 The Charge in the United Kingdom, Matthews, to Hull, March 9, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 530-31.

28 Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (New York, 1962), p. 285.

29 The Charge in the Soviet Union, Thompson, to Hull, March 21, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 535-36.

30 Memorandum of Conversation, Acting Secretary of State Wells, March 30, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 536-39.

31 Memorandum of Conversation, Wells, April 1, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 538.

32 Hull, *Memoirs*, p. 1171; Berle, *Diaries*, p. 407.

33 Memorandum of the Assistant Secretary of State Berle to the Acting Secretary of State, April 3, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, p. 539.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 540.

35 Wells to Berle, April 4, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 541-42.

36 Roosevelt to Stalin, April 11, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, pp. 542-43.

37 Hull, *Memoirs*, p. 1172.

38 Eden, *The Reckoning*, pp. 379-82.

39 Winant to Hull, May 24, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, p. 560.

40 Memorandum of Conference, Samuel M. Cross, Interpreter, May 29, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, III, p. 569.

41 Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 432; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London, 1970-1975), 4 vols. Vol. III, pp. 618-25.

42 W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1947-1946* (New York, 1975), p. 227.

43 Eden, *The Reckoning*, p. 467; Hull, *Memoirs*, p. 1266; Harriman, *Special Envoy*, p. 178.

44 For descriptions of the conference by participants see: Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York, 1950), pp. 398-428; Winston S. Churchill, *Closing the Ring* (New York, 1962), pp. 292-348; Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York, 1973), pp. 134-54. The documents are in *FRUS, The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran 1943* (Washington, 1961); the Soviet version in Robert Beitzell, ed., *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam. The Soviet Protocols* (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1970).

45 *FRUS, Teheran*, p. 594.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 595.

47 *Ibid.* Sherwood's short account puts Stalin on Roosevelt in a more favorable light; the Soviet edition omits any reference to-Roosevelt's comments on the Baltic States.