

## Article 23

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### **Dr Andrzej Sławiński, Policy of the United States of America towards the Soviet Union 1941-1945 and its Consequences for Poland**

It is difficult to deny a number of substantial achievements made by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during his unprecedented three terms of office as President of the United States between March 1933 and April 1945. The introduction of the "New Deal" created the basis of the American welfare state and eventually lifted America out of the depression and made it into perhaps the greatest industrial power in the world. His "Four Freedoms" statement in January 1941 put the aims of the war in moral terms and significantly raised the expectations of all nations for an eventual just peace. This was further confirmed by the signing in August 1941 of the Atlantic Charter by Roosevelt and Churchill. In the initial phase of the Second World War, while the United States still remained neutral, Roosevelt provided aid for Britain in the form of "Lend – Lease" and the creations of so-called "Arsenal for Democracy". Following Pearl Harbour the President was instrumental in rallying the American Nation in the war against Japan and Germany. As the war progressed, the help of the United States to the Allies in the form of supplies, war materials and eventually military manpower, was indispensable and crucial to the successful prosecution of the war and to the eventual victory.

No politician can be expected to be infallible and Roosevelt was no exception. When the Soviet Union entered the war in June 1941 and joined the Allies, the policy Roosevelt adopted towards the soon to be new ally and his personal assessment of Stalin as a man, politician and leader, surprised some people and shocked others.

When the United States entered the war, Roosevelt's position was enhanced and became unique with regard to foreign policy decisions, military strategy and world leadership. Soon the emergence of the "Big Three": Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, was to have a profound effect on the progress of the war and on the post-war geo-political structure of the world.

It is claimed that the President, in his own mind, decided that Stalin was basically a good man and good leader of his people, and that the Soviet regime and system, based after all on socialism, could be transformed, with Roosevelt's guidance, into a democracy. The President thought that he could personally handle Stalin. He was convinced that Stalin was not an imperialist. Roosevelt envisaged that he and Stalin, that is the United States and the Soviet Union together, will lead the Allies to the final victory and eventually decide the political and economic structure of the post war world. He was willing to exclude from this, Churchill and Britain (and incidentally France) as imperialists who could not be trusted to create the necessary conditions for democracy and a just peace. In future dealings of the Big Three Roosevelt invariably sided with Stalin.

In pursuit of this policy the President was aided and abetted by only a few members of his administration, notably his personal envoy Harry Hopkins, and his one time (1937) ambassador to Moscow, Joseph Davies. He decided to ignore completely the advice and warnings from such experienced observers of Europe as William Bullitt, Loy Henderson, Charles E. "Chip" Bohlen, George Keenan, Averell Harriman and Gen. John Deane, all experienced diplomats who had spent some time in Moscow.

Right until his death Roosevelt tried to win Stalin's trust and friendship. All that time Stalin did not trust the President and Soviet Union spies were stealing America's secrets. Roosevelt was always prepared to make concessions to Stalin (often against Churchill's advice) and to meet his wishes and requests. The more important of these were:

1. Gradually increasing supplies to Russia throughout the war – in spite of tremendous losses to allied shipping in the Arctic Convoys. Some of these were not used for the war effort but for the build-up of Soviet industry and power.
2. Support for Stalin's demands for a premature and militarily impossible Second Front.
3. Believing Stalin that there was no need to aid the Warsaw Rising.
4. Agreeing to Stalin's demands for the post-war western borders of the Soviet Union to be decided in terms of the 1939 Ribbentrop – Molotov pact.
5. Giving Stalin a free hand to dominate the Baltic States, most East European countries, including Poland, as well as some Balkan countries. This happened during private meetings between Roosevelt and Stalin at the Teheran and Yalta conferences.
6. Allowing the Red Army to capture Berlin, a most significant achievement, fully used by Soviet propaganda. At the same time the American Forces were sent on a wild-goose chase to capture the non-existent German Alpine Redoubt.

Stalin always did what he wanted, irrespective of the opinions and wishes of the western Allies. Because of Roosevelt's policies he was given virtually complete freedom of action and this had dire consequences for many European countries and was particularly disastrous for Poland.

Already in the summer of 1944 aid to the Polish Home Army during the Warsaw Uprising was not forthcoming because Stalin informed the President that the Home Army left Warsaw at the beginning of September 1944. Like the other countries behind the "Iron Curtain", Poland was eventually subjected to forty five years of existence in an atmosphere of lies, denial of human rights and persecution. Stalin's rule was particularly brutal in Poland – it is estimated that in the period between 1944 and 1956, a quarter of million Poles were executed the NKVD and its subservient Polish Communist Security Forces. Those who died were not only active opponents to the Communist regime, but also members of political parties, potential future national or local leaders or just western sympathisers. Among them were at least fifty thousand members of the war-time resistance, the Home Army. Many more thousands of Poles were deported to the Soviet Gulags, where many perished and others who eventually returned to Poland, were physical shadows of their former selves.

One is bound to ask – why this strange courtship of Stalin by Roosevelt? Why couldn't he see the true nature of Stalin and his regime, which was so often pointed out to him by so many members of his own administration?

There was, of course, the need to keep Stalin in the alliance because of the utilisation of hundreds of Red Army divisions in the fight against Germany and the hope of their eventual use in the war against Japan. However because of the importance of planning for the post-war world, there must have been other reasons for Roosevelt's policy.

Professor Robert Nisbet in his book about Roosevelt and Stalin (1) suggests that the President was influenced so much by his mentor, Woodrow Wilson, that he was first and foremost an anti-imperialist, and thus was prepared to forgo his real friends – "imperialistic" Britain and France – and seek accommodation with the leader of the socialist / communist system which, in principle, had to be against imperialism. If that was the reason, then the great irony is that Stalin, apart from being a director, tyrant, mass-murderer and a protagonist of a totalitarian system, turned out to be perhaps the greatest imperialist of them all.

*Andrzej Slawinski, London 2005*

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