

12-18-2014

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Recommended Citation

Burke, Richard, "Ebbs and Flows in the Relationship of Two Intriguing Men: Churchill and Stalin" (2014). *History Class Publications*. 42.
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Ebbs and Flows in the Relationship of Two Intriguing Men
Churchill and Stalin

Richard Burke

World at War

Dr. Hicks

December 18, 2014

Throughout World War II, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin were able to preserve a relatively strong private relationship even though their public relationship, through political and social perspectives, was strikingly dissimilar. The situations that these tremendously influential men went through together undoubtedly raised tension between the two, causing for a very up and down relationship. These men needed each other for the betterment of their respective countries and that factor may have forced them to exert more effort in making the relationship function no matter what.

Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill was born to Lord Randolph Churchill and Lady Randolph Churchill on November 30, 1874. He was extremely well off considering his father came from the aristocratic family of the Dukes of Marlborough. His mother was American-born to a wealthy family in New York. Although Churchill came from the nobility class in Great Britain; he did struggle through personal challenges that helped shape who he became. He failed the entrance exam three times before being accepted into cavalry school where he finished 8th in his class of over 150. He entered the military in the 1895, and was able to advance through the ranks rather quickly. This led him in the direction of the British Parliament because he always seemed interested in bettering himself financially, as well as moving up the social ladder of the upper class.

Churchill followed his father's footsteps into parliament in 1900. He was a member of the Conservative Party and remained there for several years. In 1904, he had a falling out with the Conservative Party and decided to switch over to the Liberal Party for almost twenty years. Due to a lost election in 1922, he returned to the Conservative Party, entering back into Parliament in 1924 and remaining there until his appointment as Prime Minister in 1940.

Churchill remained in the British government from 1900 until 1955; excluding about ten years due to lost elections or resignation to enter the First World War with the British Army.

Joseph Stalin had a far different rise to power in the Soviet Union than that of his British counterpart. He was born in Gori, Tiflis Governorate, which is present day Georgia, on December 18, 1878. His father was a cobbler who was an alcoholic, left their family when Joseph was not very old. Stalin's mother did the best she could, but they were just like any other impoverished family in their region of the world. This caused Joseph to work hard in school and for the most part he did rather well. He was able to make it through the majority of Seminary before being dismissed for an unspecified reason. During the course of the next few years he was trying to find himself and wound up reading the writings of Vladimir Lenin; he shortly after joined a Marxist group. Within a few months Lenin had formed the Bolsheviks off of the Marxist group and Stalin ardently signed up for the cause. He advanced through the ranks rapidly, proving to be a very valuable asset for Lenin which would eventually lead to Stalin being greedy for power. This would lead to a division amongst Lenin and Stalin after Lenin had a stroke; this giving Stalin the upper hand and opportunity to make an attempt to seize control of their party. He was able to accomplish that by means of executions, purges, and sheer terror. Joseph Stalin remained in complete control of the Soviet Union through World War II and the beginning of the Cold War between his Communist Party and the Western Capitalist.

The relationship between Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin began out of necessity with the “merciless invasion of the Nazis.”¹ Their relationship began with serious appreciation for each other, almost to the point of admiration for what the other was doing in regards to the

¹ Stalin, C. A. (1958). *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945*. Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 1.

Nazis party of Germany led by Adolf Hitler. In the correspondences amidst the two in the beginning of their relationship in the beginning of the war, they seem to treat each other not just as colleagues, but as friends. The men have a very professional relationship on the surface for the first thirteen months of their relationship. They were able to look past their ideological differences in the interest of their respective nation's national securities.

In the first letter in their personal correspondences on July 8, 1941, Churchill states to Stalin, "There is general admiration for the bravery and tenacity of the Soviet Soldiers and people. We shall do everything...our growing resources allow."² Followed by the Stalin "Allow me to thank you for your two personal messages. Your messages have initiated agreement between our two governments. Now, as you with every justification put it, the Soviet Union and Great Britain have become fighting Allies in the struggle against Hitler Germany."³ These two really did seem to appreciate what their counterpart was doing in the first few months of their relationship.

Churchill and Great Britain organized what resources they had available at the time to reinforce the Soviet military. In one letter from Churchill to Stalin, Churchill promised two hundred Tomahawk fighter aeroplanes, somewhere between two and three million soldiers entering the fight, as well as, raw materials rubber, wool, and lead. Churchill mentions that some of these supplies and materials and resources would be coming from the United States. In the letter following up in regard to the natural resources from the United States, Churchill discusses the delivery and deliverer, Mr. Harry Hopkins. He then goes on to characterize Hopkins "You

²Stalin, C. A. (1958). Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945 . Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 1.

³Stalin, C. A. (1958). Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945 . Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 2.

can trust him absolutely. He is your friend and our friend.”⁴ This is important to in regards to the relationship between Churchill and Stalin, signifying that they value each other’s friendship enough to call themselves friends. This does begin to take a turn for the worse in a letter sent on September 3, 1941 from Stalin to Churchill discussing a second front being opened in the Balkans or France by the Western Allies. Churchill responds stating that the Western Allies will not be capable of opening a front other than possibly in the extreme north, on a significantly smaller scale. Stalin goes on to stress the utter importance of opening the second front in another letter; followed by Churchill with a slight less clear message of the British intentions in the immediate future. These few exchanges between the men instigated the beginning of many challenging altercations amid the two in the very near future. Even though the two men were not in complete agreement they were still on solid enough terms to wish the other happy birthday towards the end of 1941. Stalin had an interesting way of going about it by stating “Hearty birthday greetings. I sincerely wish you the vigour and heart health that are so essential for defeating Hitlerism, the enemy of mankind.”⁵ Joseph Stalin, no matter how angry he was, always had the ability to finagle his opinion into whatever he was saying, even a birthday note. Their relationship entered to a certain degree an unstable time period for several months. They would continue their correspondences; however their rhetoric transformed into far simpler conversations. These letters basically consisting of congratulations for victories, recognizing that they would assist each other in case of breaches in the rules of war, troop movements, and assistance with supplies.

⁴ Stalin, C. A. (1958). *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945* . Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 16.

⁵ Stalin, C. A. (1958). *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945* . Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 36.

Until Mid-August of 1942 Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin had never met face to face; their relationship had been strictly kept to writing back and forth. Churchill and Stalin met for the first time in person in Moscow on August 12, 1942. The timing of this initial meeting was not exactly ideal for first impressions due to Stalin's obvious anger with the Western allies over the lack of support for a second front in the west. Within hours of their arrival, Churchill and Stalin were meeting and the bad news of the lack of aid coming from the Western Allies in late 1942 caused further distrust in the relationship. Stalin felt that his relationship among the Big Three, he was the odd man out, and there is definitely a case to be made for that. Churchill was, in a way, just a bearer of bad news from President Roosevelt and the British Cabinet when he was received in Moscow. They had obviously had no intentions of assisting the Soviets to the extent that Stalin would have preferred and probably needed them to do. This furthered the distrust in the relationship that Stalin had with Roosevelt and Churchill. This first interaction between the two men essentially went nowhere, so the men stepped away for a couple of days and attempted another gathering on the 14th of October at the Gala that was being held in honor of Churchill being in Moscow. Churchill was so fed up with the accusations of bad faith he had to be convinced to attend the Gala. After the Gala, a member of Churchill's delegation, Colonel Ian Jacob, described his impression of Stalin that night "It was extraordinary to see this little peasant [Stalin], who would not have looked at all out of place in a country lane with a pickaxe over his shoulder, calmly sitting down to a banquet in these magnificent halls"⁶ So poorly that Churchill himself described the interaction with Stalin as "Did he [Stalin] not realize who he was speaking to? The representative of the most powerful empire the world has ever seen?"⁷

⁶ Charles Richardson, *From Churchill's Secret Circle to the BBC: Biography of Lieutenant General Sir Ian Jacob, GBE, CB, DL*, Brassey's, 1991, p. 136

⁷ Entry for 15th August 1942 in Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival, 1940-1965*, Heron Books, 1966, p. 62

Obviously the first meeting didn't exactly accomplish anything, as well as the Gala, but after a little persuading from another member of Churchill's delegation, Churchill reluctantly decided to attend the final meeting set between the two men. Their relationship might have been salvaged by the decision to attend their final meeting in Moscow. They sat in the meeting and debated the same issue to no avail as they had in the previous meetings. Although after this meeting, Stalin approached Churchill and requested that he, Churchill, come back to his private quarters to dine and drink. Churchill seized this opportunity to potentially have a breakthrough with Stalin on a personal level and that worked remarkably. Churchill arrived back to his living quarters at almost three A.M. in a great mood, according to Clark Kerr who wrote Churchill commented he had "cemented a friendship' with Stalin, and that it was a 'pleasure' to work with 'that great man.'" ⁸ The drastic turn of opinion after the final meeting was astonishing considering where they started when Churchill arrived in Moscow. The issues that were unresolved after Churchill's time in Moscow would fester back up very quickly.

In response to the men's first meeting, Stalin sent a Memorandum to Churchill stating that the meeting they had had led to the establishment that the British would not be opening up a second front in in the west. He also threw a jab at Churchill stating, "It will be recalled further that the opening of the second front in Europe was designed to divert German forces from the Eastern front to the West...thereby ease the position of the soviet troops on the Soviet-German front in 1942." ⁹ This was going to Churchill, a man who knew the Western Allies had no intentions of assisting to the point of opening another front, so he was being nicer than he needed to be. This could be a result of the late night wine and cigars they shared during his time in

⁸ Diary of Archibald Clark Kerr, FO 800/300, National Archives, Kew

⁹ Stalin, C. A. (1958). Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945 . Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 60 .

Moscow. Churchill responded stating that there was no way they, the Western Allies, could open a second front in 1942, but they would continue to assist in any practical way they could. He even offered a second option of “Operation Torch” which would be an invasion of Northern Africa to prepare for an invasion of Southern Europe.¹⁰

The first meeting between Churchill and Stalin left the relationship amongst the two at an interesting place. They established that the Soviet’s Western Allies would not be able to assist the Soviets for an unspecified amount of time which made them furious. According to Stalin, this altered everything they had been planning militarily all year. As a result, their relationship went back to being a very professional and strictly business for several months. All they would discuss was troop movements and operations that were in the works.

Although once the Western Allies began “Operation Torch” Stalin began giving the impression that he had forgiven Churchill and Roosevelt for their lack of second front in late 1942. Churchill and Stalin began congratulating each other again over battles won and even wished each other a happy birthday. Their relationship remained rather neutral for several months on the personal relationship level due to Churchill’s health. He had become very unhealthy and was not able to keep up with the day to day correspondence. So for a while their letters were, for the most part, short and to the point. They would discuss troop movements, supplies needed, and operations that were in the works.

Churchill seemed to find his health again giving him more energy and will to jump back in the war effort. His and Stalin’s letters were filled with the different victories and other military escapades against Hitler Germany. Their letters were suggesting they were getting

¹⁰ Walker, David A. *OSS and Operation Torch*. 4th ed. Vol. 22. N.p.: n.p., 1987. Print. *Journal of Contemporary History*.

along for the most part because they each had the same goals at the time. This remained through Late-April of 1943 when Churchill and Stalin's relationship began to disintegrate.

On April 24, 1943, Stalin wrote to Churchill stating that the Soviets would be cutting off contact with the Polish government on the basis that they had been running an anti-Soviet slander campaign and Stalin requested that the British also end their relationship with the Poles as well. This led to Churchill responding hastily with disappointment with the fact that Stalin did not discuss this with him before cutting ties. Stalin responded by stating that he was disappointed with the lack of action by the British on the fact that they had not done anything about the anti-Soviet slander campaign. He, Churchill, in a way, backs down and says Stalin is correct they should have looked into the Polish press issue. Although they worked through this slight altercation, this was the beginning of the issues they would have dealing with foreign affairs.

Exactly three months later, Churchill and Stalin got in a tiff because Stalin mentioned that the British had not tried to assist the Soviets over the course of the war and Churchill did not take too kindly to the comment. Churchill stated that every stage of their relationship he had been honest and that he had always been sincere with what was said. The letters between the men seem to be for the most part just military strategies and relationships with other countries. The requests for supplies had slowed down dramatically, but the largest shift in their conversation was the entering of Roosevelt. Many of the letters for a while were from Churchill and Roosevelt to Stalin or from Stalin to the two. The relationship between Churchill and Stalin had essentially become a strictly business relationship. They began taking longer and longer to respond with no better excuse than a polite version of they were basically just busy. Their

relationship stayed relatively even keeled for several years. Their discussions centered on similar elements of the war as before.

Churchill had been communicating with Roosevelt about the issue of postwar Germany and the other territories that had been captured by both the Western powers and the Soviets. Churchill and Roosevelt both saw Stalin drifting away from their alliance towards the end of the war. By Mid-August 1944 Stalin was refusing requests for assistance sent by Churchill and Roosevelt. They had come to the point that each military would assist in small ways, but they were not going out of their ways for each other.

Although an interesting chain of letters between Churchill and Stalin in October of 1944 documented a visit to Moscow by Churchill. Churchill states “I am looking forward to returning to Moscow under the much happier conditions created since August 1942.”¹¹ They both understood that the initial meeting in Moscow in 1942 was a rather rough time and they had mended old wounds from that. In the October of 1944 meeting they discussed the upcoming military affairs for each country as well as the post war picture of Europe. These men obviously had an astronomically different view as to how post World War II Europe would look, but they seemed to put that aside when the official meetings were over. In the letters immediately following the trip, Churchill thanks Stalin for the gifts that Stalin sent back to England for Churchill, his wife, and daughter. Churchill signed the letter “Your friend and war comrade,”¹² signifying their respect that had come a long way since Churchill and his colleagues called Stalin a peasant only two years prior.

¹¹ Stalin, C. A. (1958). *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945*. Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 259.

¹² Stalin, C. A. (1958). *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945*. Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House p. 263.

Churchill and Stalin had a falling out towards the end of the war politically. They had been able to work through the majority of their political issues through good works and with the conclusion of the war they did not have the opportunity to make up the wrongs between nations. There were concerns with dividing up land that had been conquered and Stalin was not exactly being helpful with these matters. An issue that Churchill and Stalin each addressed in March of 1945 discussed the release of Allied prisoners of war that had captured from the Germans and been reclaimed through Allied advances. Churchill initiated the conversation requesting that the British prisoners of war be transported home, and Stalin expresses intense anger about how the British have let the Soviet prisoners be abused and starved. Elements like this towards the end of the war caused for their relationship to fizzle out and eventually lead to the end of any positive relationship they had, publically or privately.

On March 5, 1946, Churchill gave his “Iron Curtain Speech” where he publically established that the Soviet Union was a threat to his and to the other Allied nations. As he gave his speech he stated “I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is deep sympathy and goodwill in Britain -- and I doubt not here also -- toward the peoples of all the Russias and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships.” In this speech he made it abundantly clear that he and his former friend, Joseph Stalin, were no longer friends at all. In an interview with the New York Times, Stalin responded to Churchill’s remarks about the communist ideology moving through Europe and how the Soviets had put more into the fight and

they deserved more the British or the Americans.¹³ Their personal relationship was in affect over.

The relationship between Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin had such an interesting relationship because they were both the most independent dependent men on their time. They each had the ultimate authority over so many and much, but each needed the other to win the war against Hitler's Germany. These men were able to have two completely separate relationships; their relationship as heads of state and their personal friendship. Their friendship seemed to have ebbs and flows just like anyone else's; theirs just depended on how they had been assisting each other in the recent encounters. This proved to be a theme all the way to the end among the relationship of two of the most powerful men in the world at the time.

Source Analysis

By far the most important source to my paper was the book *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945*. This book is an incredibly credible source because it is a chronological list of letters sent and received from Joseph Stalin with the other important men of the day, including Winston Churchill. There is no analysis or commentary that could be considered bias; it is strictly the personal correspondence between Stalin and Churchill. Another source I used in my paper was Tommy Norton's *Winston...was Complaining of a Slight Headache*. This resource gave me great insight to the events of the party that travelled with Churchill in Moscow of 1942. This source was is also a credible source due to the fact that it came from the United Kingdom's National Archives. I also look at a hand full of other sources that I found on JSTOR or on another school's library page. I believe that due to the nature of my

¹³ "Modern History Sourcebook: Joseph Stalin: Reply to Churchill, 1946." *Modern History Sourcebook: Stalin: Reply to Churchill, 1946*. New York Times, n.d. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. <<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1946stalin.html>>.

paper the majority of the writing is based on the correspondence of the two men back and forth giving the sources of this paper credibility.

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