“My advice is: As soon as your Chiefs of Staff have completed the plans for the northern offensive to your satisfaction, you should send them by a most trusted messenger and advocate to Churchill and his War Council as the American plan which you propose and intend to go ahead with if accepted by Britain. And then having done that, you should lean with all your strength on the ruthless rearrangement of shipping allotments and the preparation of landing gear for the ultimate invasion. That latter work is now going on at a rather dilatory pace. It should be pushed with the fever of war action, aimed at a definite rate of completion not later than September.

By the end of March, Stimson, Marshall, and Company had a double-pronged war plan for a second front. Between eighteen and twenty-one divisions, including armored, motorized, and one airborne, would be prepared for a massive assault across the Channel by April 1943. A contingency plan was also drawn for a more limited operation, employing a third as many men, for the fall of 1942. The purpose of the second plan betrayed the Army’s concern that the Soviets might be either too weak or too strong. It would be employed only if the Russians faced imminent collapse without a second front—“in this case the attack should be regarded as a sacrifice to the common good.” Or it would be used if the German defenses in Western Europe became critically weakened.

On April 1, 1942, Stimson and Marshall took their plans to the White House. They were worried about the President’s reaction. In past meetings he had shown, they felt, a tendency to respond too readily to the widely scattered needs of his allies and his area commanders. Stimson feared he might go in for another “dispensation debauch.” Marshall had tapped the President’s habit of “tossing out new operations” as his “cigarette-holder gesture.” But this time they found their chief ready to be convinced. Whatever the difficulties, he recognized the importance of bolstering the Russians and keeping them in the war. Not only did he endorse a cross-channel attack, but he decided to send Hopkins and Marshall to London to consult Churchill. The President’s decision “will mark this day as a memorable one in the war,” Stimson noted in his diary for this April Fool’s Day.

“What Harry and George Marshall will tell you all about has my heart and mind in it,” Roosevelt wrote to Churchill three days later. “Your people and mine demand the establishment of a front to draw off pressure on the Russians, and these people are wise enough to see that the Russians are today killing more Germans and destroying more equipment than you and I put together. Even if full success is not attained, the big objective will be . . .”

In London the Americans found Churchill surprisingly responsive to their plans. They sent optimistic reports to Roosevelt about the prospects for agreement. Actually Churchill was skeptical of an early large-scale invasion and downright hostile to an emergency landing in the fall of 1942. All his old fears remained of another desperate landing with a strong possibility of defeat and evacuation, as in Gallipoli, of a premature British commitment before the Americans could invest heavy ground and air power, of another blood bath in France like World War I. As always, he was playing with thoughts of peripheral operations; an invasion of northern Norway was the favorite at the moment. His military chiefs, notably Brooke, put their professional judgment behind his fears and doubts. Uncharacteristically, though, Churchill did not present his real views bluntly. He accepted the cross-channel attack in principle but lobbed up reservations and qualifications. At this juncture he wanted neither to discourage his ally Stalin, who, after all, could make some kind of deal with Hitler, nor to thwart his friend Roosevelt, who might give in to popular clamor to concentrate in the Pacific and abandon Atlantic First.

The London meetings took place during the Japanese naval victories in the Bay of Bengal. Again and again Churchill conjured up the dread picture of a Japanese conquest of India and a meeting with the Germans in the Middle East. In fact this picture was something of a hag. The Japanese did not plan a strategic offensive against India. At this point they were heading in just the opposite direction—toward a naval attack in the central Pacific and the fateful showdown at Midway. Hitler was too involved in Russia to make a strategic commitment in the Middle East. The Germans and Japanese were not even conducting joint strategy.

But Churchill saw a mortal peril. To desert four hundred million of His Majesty’s Indian subjects would be shameful, to let the Germans and Japanese join hands in India or the Middle East would be a “measureless disaster.” Roosevelt doubted that the enemy would join hands but he could not doubt the intensity of Churchill’s feeling of imperial obligation to this huge, vulnerable area.

REPRISE: RUSSIA SECOND

Heartened by Churchill’s apparent support of a cross-channel second front, the President turned to the ticklish job of involving the Kremlin in both the problems and the possibilities of the plan. It was unfortunate, he wrote to Stalin, that the distances were too great for them to meet; he hoped that next summer they could spend a few days together near their common border off Alaska, but in the meantime he hoped Stalin could promptly send Molotov...
and a general to discuss "a very important military proposal involving the utilization of our armed forces in a manner to relieve your critical Western Front."

A week later Stalin responded that he would send Molotov "for an exchange of views on the organization of a second front in Europe in the near future." He, too, hoped for a personal meeting. Roosevelt was pleased at the prospect of the Foreign Commissar’s visit. As always, he felt that problems and misunderstandings could best be overcome by face-to-face talk. "I know you will not mind my being brutally frank," he had written to Churchill a few weeks before, "when I tell you that I think I can personally handle Stalin better than either your Foreign Office or my State Department. Stalin hates the guts of all your top people. He thinks he likes me better and I hope he will continue to do so..."

Molotov arrived at the White House on the afternoon of May 29, 1942. He arrived in a state of uncertainty and apprehension, as symbolized by the pistol—along with a roll of sausage and a chunk of black bread—that he carried in his luggage. He had left a Kremlin still resentful over the lag in American military aid, the diversion of supplies to other battlefields, and the delay in planning for a second front. He had stopped in London on the way and signed with Eden a twenty-year peace treaty, but had found Churchill studiously vague about plans for an invasion of the Continent. At this point the Soviet spoiling attacks in the Crimea and south of Kharkov were going badly.

Soon the Foreign Commissar was installed, pistol and all, in a room on the family floor and then meeting with the President, Hull, Hopkins, Litvinov, and two interpreters. At first the discussion stumbled. For all his confidence in man-to-man talk, the President found Molotov stiff and reticent, and the translation delays were cramping. Seeking to establish common ground, Roosevelt ventured that the Soviets might work out some understanding with the Germans over prisoners of war. Molotov sharply dismissed any idea of treating with the treacherous Nazis, whereupon the President remarked that he had similar problems with Japanese treatment of American prisoners, who were fed on the Japanese army rations—"starvation for any white man." After desultory talk about other matters—but not the second front—Hopkins suggested that the Foreign Commissar might like to rest.

Things warmed up after cocktails and dinner that evening. The President talked at length about disarming after the war, policing Germany and Japan, guaranteeing peace for at least twenty-five years, or for as long as his and Stalin’s and Churchill’s generation could expect to live. Molotov seemed responsive, even amiable.

Next day Roosevelt brought Marshall and King into the discussions and asked Molotov to brief them on the strategic situation.

The Russian drew a gloomy picture. Hitler might throw so many men and machines into the next general offensive that the Red Army might not be able to hold. The Nazis would be immensely strengthened, since they would then command food and raw materials in the Ukraine and oil in the Caucasus. This was the ominous prospect. But if the Americans and British were to create a new front and draw off forty German divisions in 1942, Russia could either beat Germany in 1942 or definitely insure its ultimate defeat. It must be 1942, not 1943, because in another year Hitler would be the undisputed master of the Continent and the job would be immeasurably more difficult.

He wanted a straight answer. What was the President’s position on a second front?

Roosevelt was ready for the question, but he let Marshall answer it. Were developments clear enough, he asked the Chief of Staff, that we could tell Mr. Stalin that we were preparing a second front? Yes, said the General. Roosevelt then authorized Molotov to tell his government that it could expect the formation of a second front "this year." Disturbed by this apparent commitment, Marshall talked about the problems: the shipping shortage, getting enough men across the Channel, seizing air superiority. King stressed the frightful losses on the Murmansk route; only the day before, a destroyer and five ships out of a convoy of thirty-five had been lost. The Admiral hoped that the Soviet Air Force might bomb German air and submarine bases in northern Norway. Molotov favored a proposal by the President that twenty-four heavy bombers fly from Khartoum, bomb Rumanian oil fields, and land in Russia, but he was cool to a presidential tender that American fighter planes be delivered by air from Alaska to Siberia. The meeting recessed for an official lunch, at which Molotov reminisced about Hitler and Ribbentrop—"the two most disagreeable people he had ever had to deal with"—and the President toasted the masterful leadership of Joseph Stalin, whom he looked forward to meeting.

Thus Roosevelt made the fateful pledge. Later there would be controversy as to just what he had promised—what kind of second front, where, and when—but all the discussions with Molotov clearly implied a cross-channel attack by all the ground and air power Britain and the United States could muster, in August or September of 1942. Roosevelt’s reasons seem equally clear in retrospect. He was affected by Molotov’s dark picture of the Eastern Front, even though the Foreign Commissar stressed that Russia would never surrender. The news from that front seemed blacker day by day. It had long been agreed that a quick assault must be launched in the west if Russia seemed to be losing. Now the time seemed to have come.

The President, moreover, had an embarrassment on his hands.
He had recently promised the Russians 4.1 million tons of shipments, most of it general supplies but 1.8 million tons of it in planes, tanks, and guns. It was soon evident that the shipping shortage, production delays, and the stepped-up plans for supplies to Britain made such support impossible. Roosevelt decided to leave intact the military aid, which the Russians would need during the summer, and slash the general supplies by more than two-thirds. At his last meeting with Molotov he proposed this reduction on the ground that it would make available a large number of ships that could carry to Britain the munitions needed for the second front. Molotov reminded him that nonmilitary supplies like railroads had a direct bearing on maintaining the front.

A sharp exchange followed. Every ship shifted to England, Roosevelt repeated, brought the second front closer to realization; the Soviets could not eat their cake and have it, too. Molotov bristled at this. The second front would be stronger if the first front still stood. What would happen, he asked cuttingly, if the Soviets got less supply and then no second front eventuated? Evidently sensing a soft brokerage element in the President’s proposal, Molotov became insistent. What answer should he take back about a second front? The President was placatory. He told his guest that the statement was too strong and urged that there be no reference to 1942, but Roosevelt wanted it kept in. Molotov left Washington happy, the declaration in his pocket; the President wrote to Winant that his Russian visitor had “actually got chummy” toward the end.

When Molotov returned to London with the communiqué, Churchill agreed to its publication in order to deceive the enemy, but he did not want to deceive his friends. He told Molotov both orally and in writing that although preparations were going forward, he could not promise a second front in 1942. When Molotov said that he had agreed to a reduction in supplies, the Prime Minister was unmoved; he could not see how Roosevelt’s proposal to cut Russia’s tonnage deliveries would help solve the problem of landing a small army on a heavily fortified coast. He was fully resolved on a big invasion in 1943, and if it was possible to do in 1942 what was planned for 1943, so much the better. With this vague reassurance Molotov flew back to Moscow and to a jubilant meeting of the Supreme Soviet, where in Stalin’s presence he quoted the communiqué.

Churchill had sent to Washington Lord Louis Mountbatten, the youthful, adventurous Chief of Combined Operations, to present to Roosevelt some of the dire problems of staging a cross-channel attack in 1942; when Mountbatten reported to him that Roosevelt was talking about a “sacrificial landing” if Russia should be nearing collapse, the Prime Minister decided that he should fly to Washington to keep the President from “getting a little off the rails.” His military staff continued to argue strongly against a 1942 assault, but he knew that Stimson and Marshall were pressing for it hard. Roosevelt, as usual, welcomed the visit and invited Churchill to see him first at Hyde Park. As the Prime Minister, Brooke, and Ismay left London on June 17, reports were coming in from Africa that the British were in full retreat and Rommel’s forces were closing in around Tobruk.

Two days later the President was waiting in his car when Churchill came to a bumpy landing on a small airstrip near Hyde Park. He showed the Prime Minister his convertible and then drove him around the estate and out on the lawn overlooking the river. Churchill had some anxious moments as his host, using manual controls, turned and backed the car over the grassy bluffs and darted into thick woods to slip away from the Secret Service; the President tried to reassure him by inviting him to feel his biceps, which he said a famous prize fighter had envied. All the time they talked, with Churchill trying not to take Roosevelt’s mind off his driving. After lunch the talk continued in Roosevelt’s hot little study off the portico. Plans for a landing were going ahead, Churchill told the President, but not one of his commanders had been able to make a plan for September 1942 that had any chance of success. Had the American staff a plan? What would be required? Who would command? In the evening the two men boarded the presidential train for Washington.

Next day Churchill had hardly entered the President’s study when a secretary came in with a telegram. Roosevelt read the pink slip and without a word handed it to Churchill, TIRBRUK HAS SURRENDERED, with twenty-five thousand men taken prisoners. Churchill visibly winced. Defeat he could take; this he felt was disgrace. There was a moment of silence. Then Roosevelt said:

“What can we do to help?”

“Give us as many Sherman tanks as you can spare, and ship them to the Middle East as quickly as possible.”
The President sent for Marshall. The Chief of Staff had hardly been able to scrape together enough modern tanks to supply his armored units, after heartbreaking delays. But he rose to the occasion, too. “It is a terrible thing to take the weapons out of a soldier’s hands,” he said—but if Churchill needed them he could have them.

The fall of Tobruk clinched the British opposition to a European second front in 1942. The plan died hard. Churchill and his generals continued to pay lip service to a cross-channel attack in theory while finding numberless reasons to oppose or delay it in practice. Roosevelt continued to favor it in general while still allocating ships and supplies to other battle sectors across the vast fronts of Africa and Asia. Stimson kept pounding away at the President, as did Marshall, until Roosevelt sent him, along with Hopkins and King, to London for a showdown with the British. Roosevelt’s instructions were ambivalent: to fight hard for an attack in France that year, but if that was “finally and definitely out of the picture,” to determine upon another place for United States troops to fight in 1942. The three Americans found the British dead set against a second front in Europe. Other ways to commit American troops in 1942 were canvassed; attention turned more and more to Northwest Africa.

The President could hold out no longer, especially since he was somewhat ambivalent himself toward the cross-channel attack for 1942. Giving in to the British, he pressed for a decision on Africa, since time was getting short even for that lesser operation. When Hopkins cabled that the British were delaying a decision on that question, too, Roosevelt urged that planning proceed at once for African landings not later than October 20. He was relieved that a decision was finally in the works; tell Churchill, he said to Hopkins, that the orders now were “full speed ahead.”

Who would tell the Bear in Moscow? After all the hopeful talk and half-promises, how would Stalin be informed that there would be no cross-channel attack in 1942? Churchill, who was headed for Cairo to deal directly with Middle Eastern command changes after Rommel’s thrust east, glumly volunteered to go on to Moscow to impart the bad news. The President suggested he tell Stalin that a course of action had definitely been set for 1942 without informing him of its precise nature. “It is essential for us to bear in mind the whole Crimea, easily captured Rostov, crossed the Don, and were moving slowly toward Stalingrad. In the south they were racing toward the eastern shore of the Black Sea, penetrating the Caucasian foothills, and heading for the prized oil fields to the southeast. Once again Stalin faced desperate shortages, and he could not forget all the delays in shipments and all the diversions of supplies Churchill and Roosevelt had tolerated or effected—diversions to the Pacific, to the Middle East, even to Britain. After a convoy to Murmansk had been decimated, Churchill decided to suspend further such perilous expeditions during the long summer days; he told Stalin he could not defend the convoys with big warships because any major losses would jeopardize the “whole command of the Atlantic.” Stalin had answered furiously late in July that wars could not be fought without losses, the Soviet Union was suffering far greater losses—and “I state most emphatically that the Soviet Government cannot tolerate the Second Front in Europe being postponed till 1943.”

Harriman flew with Churchill to Moscow and cabled the proceedings to an anxious Roosevelt. On the first evening, Harriman reported, Stalin answered Churchill’s arguments with a bluntness that approached insult. You cannot win wars, he said, if you are afraid of the Germans. He showed little interest in a 1943 second front. Churchill adroitly brought the discussion around to the increased heavy bombing of German cities—an agreeable topic to Stalin—and then to the plans for North Africa. Instantly Stalin showed an intense interest in these plans and before long was giving a masterly defense of them.

At the next evening’s session, however, the atmosphere turned polar again. Stalin opened the meeting by handing Churchill and Harriman an aide-memoire asserting that a 1942 second front had been “pre-decided” during Molotov’s trip, that the Soviet had based their summer and fall plans on the assumption of such a front, that this failure not only inflicted a “moral blow on the whole of the Soviet foreign opinion” but would impair the Anglo-American military position as well. When Stalin said that if the British infantry would only fight the Germans as the Russians and indeed the RAF had done, it would not be so afraid of them, Churchill said: “I pardon that remark only on account of the bravery of the Russian troops.” When Harriman asked about plans for ferrying American aircraft across Siberia the dictator turned on him: “Wars are not won with plans.”

Another strange shift of mood occurred the next evening, Harri-
man reported to the President. Stalin was in good spirits at the state dinner and seemed completely oblivious of the previous evening's unpleasantness. On the final evening Stalin invited Churchill to his apartment, and, after introducing his daughter, Svetlana, to his guest, talked with Churchill for six hours. "On the whole," Churchill cabled to Roosevelt, "I am definitely encouraged by my visit to Moscow." Roosevelt cabled Stalin that "we must bring our forces and our power against Hitler at the earliest possible moment."

Roosevelt, like the others, wondered why the Russians had blown so hot and cold during the short series of meetings. Both Harriman and Eden had encountered equally mystifying shifts in earlier conferences. There was speculation that Stalin on his own was friendly but had to take a harsher line in the presence of Politburo members or in reporting to them. Probably the truth was simpler. Frightful reports from the front, especially the Stalingrad sector, were arriving at the Kremlin during Churchill's visit.

Still, Stalin was profoundly ambivalent. Even as he denounced the lack of American and British help he must have reflected—for he never lost sight of the long-run, postwar implications of immediate decisions—on the strategic aspect of the Soviets' taking the brunt of the ground fighting in 1942. If the Anglo-Americans were tardy in returning to Europe, where would the various armies stand after the crushing of Germany?

**ASIA THIRD**

All the immediate decisions made in the crucible of crises and conflict, all the improvisations and expediencies, would have their long-run effects. Doubtless Hopkins was reflecting much of the President's feeling when he wrote to Winant after Molotov's departure from Washington in June: "We simply cannot organize the world between the British and ourselves without bringing the Russians in as equal partners. For that matter, if things go well with Chiang Kai-shek, I would surely include the Chinese too. The days of the policy of the 'white man's burden' are over. Vast masses of people simply are not going to tolerate it and for the life of me I can't see why they should. . . ." But the Soviets could hardly feel they were equal partners if they took an unequal share of the losses among the United Nations without an extra share of postwar compensation. Nor could the Chinese. Nor could the Indians.

While Churchill was dampening Soviet second-front hopes in Moscow, his political policy in Asia was facing its harshest test. The failure of the Cripps mission precipitated a crisis in the Indian Congress. Gandhi and the other militants were urging civil disobedience. Nehru was in a dilemma. He abhorred any brand of fascism, supported the cause of the United Nations, and admired the Russian and Chinese defense against invaders. He believed, indeed, that a United Nations victory was necessary for Indian freedom. But he distrusted the British and wanted to stay abreast of his master, Gandhi, and the other nationalists as India marched toward independence. At a meeting of Congress leaders late in April Nehru supported a Gandhi-inspired resolution calling for a scorched-earth resistance to the Japanese while neither helping nor hindering Britain's war effort. "Quit India," Gandhi demanded of the British Raj; soon thousands were rallying to the call.

Early in the summer, as emotions were rising, Gandhi appealed to Roosevelt. "Dear Friend," he began.

"I twice missed coming to your great country. I have the privilege [of] having numerous friends there both known and unknown to me. . . . I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson. I say this to tell you how much I am connected with your country." He went on to speak in the same vein of Great Britain; his plea that the British should unreservedly withdraw their rule, he said, was prompted by the friendliest intention.

"My personal position is clear. I hate all war. If, therefore, I could persuade my countrymen, they would make a most effective and decisive contribution in favour of an honourable peace. But I know that all of us have not a living faith in non-violence." So he proposed that if the Allies thought it necessary, they might keep their troops, at their own expense, in India, not for maintaining internal order but for preventing Japanese aggression and defending China. Then India must become free, even as America and Britain were. Only the full acceptance of his proposal could put the Allied cause on an unassailable basis.

"I venture to think that the Allied declaration, that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow, so long as India and, for that matter, Africa are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Negro problem in her own home. But in order to avoid all complications, in my proposal I have confined myself only to India. If India becomes free, the rest must follow, if it does not happen simultaneously. . . ."

It was a compelling appeal to the Roosevelt of the Four Freedoms, a bold linking of the aspirations of Indians, Chinese, Africans, and even American Negroes—but it produced no reply from Washington. In Chungking, now almost cut off from India by Japanese troops, Chiang somberly watched the growing crisis in the subcontinent. He had long felt a natural kinship with Indian