was the idol of American youth for twenty years. His managers did everything to squeeze the last drop out of this gifted performer and America was amazed by the prolonged resistance Presley put up against his exploiters. The people who were pushing him further along the path of vulgarity succeeded only in breaking the health of this goose that laid the golden egg. He became seriously ill, and the media was full of it. Instead of treatment, however, he was given more contracts for countless performances that would bring huge profits to his backers. It was well known long before his death that he was addicted to narcotics and stimulants, but the octopus would not loosen its grip. Presley's talent collapsed and he died at the age of forty-three.

There are of course Americans who understand what is going on and who condemn it. But they are helpless against the almighty dollar and the spiritual devastation it wreaks.

To travel from the Soviet Union to the United States during the war, when the direct transatlantic route was out of the question, was no simple matter. The only reliable way was to fly right across Siberia and the Soviet Far East to Alaska, then south through Canada and the western United States and across to Washington. I made the trip three times.

The route across Siberia and Alaska was arduous, and our pilots nicknamed it 'the Mazuruk line', after Hero of the Soviet Union Major-General Ilya Mazuruk, a famous pilot and chief of polar aviation.

The flight from Washington took five days, one way. Siberia seemed endless. The plane flew on for hours, but always below was the taiga. That was when I first realised just how vast our country is. Somewhere above Yakutia we observed a huge fire, its broken front extending for tens of kilometres into the taiga. The glow made me think of what it must be like on the front, where at that time our soldiers were dying.

I flew that route for the last time in 1944, and on that occasion the weather produced some surprises for us. I had been appointed head of the delegation to the Dumbarton Oaks conference which was to produce the UN Charter, and the delegation included leading experts on international law. We flew without incident to Chukotka, but then we were stranded for more than twenty-four hours in the tiny settlement of Uelkal, on the shore of the Krest gulf. The plane could not take off because of the weather. The wind was hurricane force and though it was August one could feel the cold breath of the north.

Uelkal consisted of a few huts. After we had been settled in one
we were told: 'If you want the evening to pass more quickly, you'd better try the mobile cinema next door. They're going to show the war news.'

As we got outside we had to grab hold of each other to stay upright. 'Next door' was 200 metres away and we could cover the ground against the wind only by helping each other. After much time and no little effort, we reached the small building where the film was being shown. It was packed. The whole population was there, consisting of women, children and old men, all the young men having been mobilised, as everywhere else in Russia.

They started with the news. The turning-point in the war had long passed and the Red Army was advancing steadily. Every scene showed another victory, and the audience became very excited. Then a war adventure film was shown. Many such films were being churned out at the Alma Ata studios during the war. Most had little artistic merit, with the enemy shown in caricature, but they gave harmless entertainment to people who were longing to see just about any film, as long as it was about the war. The same thing was going on all over the country and, to tell the truth, in our embassies too. There in the Far North the audience was enthralled, and, although the little hall was stifling, nobody left before the very end.

Getting back to our hut was even harder. The wind literally blew one off one's feet.

The hurricane had ceased by morning but we were still unable to take off because the weather ahead was too bad. So we stayed a few hours and got to know something about the life of the local Chukchi, an ethnic group whose living conditions had recently begun to improve under the Soviet regime.

We visited the local kolkhoz (collective farm) and found that the manager, a Chukchi, had studied in the Leningrad Peoples of the North Institute. Shortly before the war he had contracted tuberculosis and been advised to go straight back to Chukotka, where the climate and food would soon get him back to health.

'I wasn't taken for the front because of the TB,' he said, 'but now the disease is getting better. I feel fine here at home.'

He told us how worried he was for the children of the men at the front, and how the women had replaced the men doing typical jobs of the Far North, such as fishing, hunting and reindeer-herding in the tundra. It touched us that even this tiny settlement in far-off Chukotka was sharing the hardships of the entire country, anxiously waiting for news from the front of victory over Nazi Germany.

The turning-point of the war had come in the winter of 1942–3. As the Red Army began its victorious advance, this turn of events gave rise to a host of problems requiring urgent attention and it was plain the Allies must meet to discuss not only how to fight the war and secure victory but also how to lay the foundations for the post-war organisations of peace.

Three such conferences took place between 1943 and 1945—Tehran (28 November to 1 December 1943), Yalta (4–11 February 1945) and Potsdam (17 July to 2 August 1945)—and the decisions taken at all three are published and freely available. Even so, there is still lively public interest in them, as people want to know the true course of events during and after the war—especially since these decisions have been deliberately falsified by some politicians in the West who claim that they were not well founded and even call for them to be repudiated.

Certainly American officials are reluctant to recall certain facts about Tehran, and in London they are even less enthusiastic. And yet this conference was very important, representing as it did a significant stage in the development of Allied relations.

The proposal that the Big Three meet in Tehran was contained in a message of 5 November 1943 from Stalin that I personally delivered to Roosevelt. In his reply the President wrote: 'The whole world is waiting for us three to meet, and the fact that you, Churchill and I will get to know each other personally will have far-reaching consequences...and contribute to the further worsening of Nazi morale.'

My post involved me in all the painstaking work of the three countries in organising the conference, as well as taking part in it and then carrying out its decisions. I shall dwell on the three most important issues discussed.

Firstly, the idea of opening a second front. Britain's position, which Churchill defended with zeal, was that the enemy could be defeated through attrition by carrying out a series of operations on his southern flank: in northern Italy, the Balkans, Romania and other German satellites. The real point of this policy was plain: to stand in the way of the Soviet armies' advance on Berlin and, by occupying south-eastern Europe, to obtain for the Western Allies an opening to the Soviet Union's western borders.
At Tehran, Stalin actively urged the Allies to open a second front in western Europe as soon as possible. He tried repeatedly to make Churchill commit himself to a date for landing Allied troops in Europe, but could get nothing out of him. On one occasion, barely able to contain himself, he rose from his chair and said to Voroshilov and Molotov: 'We've got too much to do at home to waste our time here. We're not getting anywhere.'

In confusion, and obviously afraid that the conference might break up, Churchill hastily announced: 'The marshal has misunderstood me. I can give an exact date — May 1944.'

The atmosphere relaxed immediately and the participants continued working. The Western Allies adopted a more constructive approach and, although they did not quite keep to the May 1944 date for the invasion of France, 'Overlord' — the code-word for the operation — took place on 6 June of that year.

Secondly, the Tehran conference was an important milestone in another respect. By the time it took place there was no doubt about the defeat of Germany and her allies. But what then? Those who took part in the conference knew this question was knocking at their door.

The Soviet Union, the USA and Britain all regarded it as essential that any possibility of further aggression from Germany should be excluded. The US and British governments had not yet officially revealed their plans for dealing with Germany when she had been defeated, but rumours had percolated from one capital or the other that plans were being hatched to split Germany up into small states. At Tehran, both nations brought this idea out into the open. Although it was clear that neither Roosevelt nor Churchill had any plan worked out, they shared the belief that special attention be paid to Prussia as the most aggressive part of the German Reich, that its wings should be clipped by reducing its territory.

Having listened to the American President and the British Prime Minister, Stalin made the following comment: 'On the field of battle, Prussians, Bavarians, Saxons and the troops from other parts of Germany all fight with the same determination. In my opinion, the German question cannot be solved by breaking up the unified German state. You cannot eliminate Germany like that any more than you could eliminate Russia. A solution should be sought through the demilitarisation and democratisation of Germany as a whole. Nazism and the

Wehrmacht must be liquidated and the criminal leaders of the Third Reich must be put on trial by the people.'

He then made a simple but wise suggestion: 'As this question needs some thought and further work, representatives of the three powers should get busy on it.' The others agreed. The matter was complex and indeed would not be settled until 1945, at Potsdam.

The fate of Poland was the third vitally important issue discussed at Tehran. Our allies were plainly aware that the Soviet–German front was approaching Polish territory and bringing closer Poland's liberation, and they were afraid therefore that the Polish democratic forces, which had mounted a mighty anti-fascist resistance, might form government organs that would be loyal to socialism and friendly to the Soviet Union.

The governments of the USA and Britain wanted post-war Poland to follow the old bourgeois–landowner path. They were trying to bring about the return of the country's reactionary government in exile, and to this end were urging the Soviet Union to re-establish diplomatic relations which had been broken off on 25 April 1943 because of that government's openly anti-Soviet stance.

The policy pursued by Washington and London was manifested by the fact that, having broken an earlier agreement with the Soviet Union, the exile government effected the removal from Soviet territory of locally formed Polish army units. The Polish exile government also put forward absurd demands concerning the Polish–Soviet border. Roosevelt was the first to speak of this at the official sessions on the Polish question, but Churchill quickly gave him his most active support. How could he not? The Polish exile government was entrenched in London and enjoyed open British protection.

On the Polish question, Roosevelt clearly had one eye on the forthcoming presidential election, in which he wanted to gain the support of the seven million Polish Americans, many of whom had been influenced by widespread anti-Soviet propaganda in the USA. At the same time, Roosevelt was wary of Churchill's wish to impose a government on Poland that was blatantly hostile to the USSR. With good reason he believed that such an attempt could lead to a split in the Allied ranks. In an interview in the New York Times of 19 January 1944, the US ambassador to the USSR, Averell Harriman, dissociating himself from the Polish exile government's line, frankly observed: 'This government is decid-
ing the future of Poland on the basis of a British and American struggle with Russia. I don’t see that we have any interest in such a situation.’ It was a statement that did him honour.

Were there good reasons for the Soviet Union to restore relations with the Polish exile government? On balance, no. Not only was that government carrying on hostile intrigues against us, but its policies were also increasingly diverging from the interests of Polish people, and in consequence it was steadily losing their support. Churchill and Roosevelt saw the recklessness of this and even tried to talk reason to the Polish government, but in vain. The reactionary Polish exiles were determinedly heading for the scrapheap.

The parties to Tehran also expressed their views on Poland’s future borders. To demonstrate his ideas on where the borders between the USSR, Poland and Germany ought to be, Churchill used three matches, one for each.

‘These matches,’ he said, ‘must be moved west in order to settle one of the main questions standing before us – the guarantee of the Soviet Union’s western borders.’

It is worth noting that our legal right to such a guarantee was here recognised by Britain and the USA.

Seeking to clarify exactly how Churchill’s matches could be applied to the issue, Stalin stated: ‘The Soviet Union recognises the Soviet–Polish border of 1939 and regards this as just.’

The border he had in mind was the one which had been created by the reunification of western Belorussia and western Ukraine with the Belorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics, respectively.

The Tehran conference finally adopted the formula: ‘the core of the Polish state and people must be located between the so-called Curzon Line and the River Oder.’ These words incorporated the Soviet point of view, and it was also agreed in principle that Königsberg and its hinterland would be transferred to the Soviet Union.

Thus the Soviet Union at Tehran set the solution of the Polish question and its borders on a path that would satisfy both the interests of the Polish people and the needs of European and international security. We could not permit post-war Poland to be turned into a convenient bridgehead for anti-Soviet adventures. Stalin made this perfectly clear to Roosevelt and Churchill and they fully appreciated the logic of his position.

In order to strengthen the alliance and speed the end of the war, Stalin then announced that the USSR would enter the war against Japan. In precise terms, he said: ‘After Hitler’s Germany has been destroyed, the Soviet Union will give the necessary help to the Allies in the war against Japan.’

Briefly but significantly, the Allies also discussed the outline of their post-war collaboration in securing a stable peace, and expressed in general terms their views on the creation of an international security organisation. No firm decisions were taken on this issue, but the idea of three-power collaboration for international peace found expression in the Tehran declaration: ‘We are sure that the agreement between us guarantees a stable peace. We fully recognise the high responsibility that lies on us and on all the United Nations to bring about a peace that will meet the approval of the mass of the nations of the earth and that will eliminate the calamity and horrors of war for many generations to come.’

All the participants considered Tehran to have been necessary and useful. Most importantly, it fixed the date for opening the second front in France, thus shortening the war and reducing the loss of life. ‘The mutual understanding we have reached here’, as the declaration, signed by Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill, stated, ‘guarantees us victory.’

Churchill made an effective symbolic gesture at the conference by handing Stalin a sword of honour for the people of Stalingrad, sent by George VI as a token of the British people’s respect.

On returning from Tehran, Roosevelt gathered his cabinet and told them with great warmth about the co-operation which had characterised the conference and about the contribution made by the Soviet delegation. The majority of Congress recognised the importance of the conference, and the newspapers prominently carried such headlines as ‘Allies vow to make three-pronged attack’ or ‘Big Three reach full agreement in Tehran’.

Such discontented voices as there were were drowned in the general approval. It was in these circumstances that in December 1943 I first visited Cuba to present my credentials as envoy. We had established diplomatic relations with Cuba and I had to double up as envoy. Bad weather on the way back meant we had to stay overnight in Jacksonville, Florida. I remember it well, since it was New Year’s Eve and the hotel owner, on learning that the Soviet ambassador and his wife were staying at his hotel, wanted to express his admiration of the Soviet army’s victories, and, to
please us, he said, 'I've made a surprise for you: a Russian supper.' You could call what we were served only relatively 'Russian', but it was a sincere expression of American friendship for the Russian people and we were touched.

After Tehran, Roosevelt was ill for a while, and so it was not until early February 1944 that I had the chance to discuss with him the results of the meeting of the Big Three.

He began by emphasising the good terms he was on with Stalin. He then summarised how the conference had gone, and finally he told me: 'To achieve agreement, it was often necessary to put pressure on Churchill. He turns towards compromise rather slowly, I'm afraid. But turn he did, and we reached some pretty useful understandings.' As he talked about Churchill, the President bestowed on me one of his charming 'Roosevelt' smiles and made it plain that the British Prime Minister was a partner who gave him plenty of trouble.

A little over a year after Tehran, the Big Three met again, this time in February 1945, at the Livadiya Palace in Yalta, in the Crimea, where the last of the Romanovs had once enjoyed sumptuous holidays.

Everything looked triumphant and majestic. Stalin entered the conference hall with the Soviet delegation following behind. Silence reigned. Roosevelt and Churchill were already in their places. Stalin approached the table and greeted Churchill, who had risen and come forward towards him, and then Roosevelt, who could not rise quickly without help and remained sitting.

The first session dealt with military questions. Our delegation included a group of military experts headed by deputy chief of Red Army staff General Alexei Antonov. He had sessions with his US and British counterparts on a daily basis to exchange information and agree joint military actions, and at the first session he reported on the Soviet-German front.

By this time the Allies had landed in Normandy, and a worrying situation had arisen in January owing to a German breakthrough in the Ardennes. Churchill had requested help from Stalin, as a result of which the Soviet High Command had decided to speed up their plans. Although Soviet troops were not yet fully prepared to go over to the attack—a plan is a plan—the offensive was begun on 12 January. Antonov reported that Soviet troops had fought for eighteen days over a distance of 500 kilometres, that forty-five German divisions had been destroyed, that the roads linking the enemy's grouping in East Prussia with central Germany had been cut, and that the Germans had had to move troops from the western to the eastern front.

The news was impressive. The Soviet troops had provided considerable help to the Allies, and both Churchill and Roosevelt listened attentively. The Soviet general then proposed that the Allied advance in the west be speeded up, that they bomb the German columns and transports as they moved eastwards and that they prevent the enemy moving his troops out of Italy.

Roosevelt was listening intently, while Churchill puffed away on his cigar and never took his eyes off the speaker. Although the translation was not simultaneous, Churchill watched the speaker, not the translator.

When Stalin spoke, which as a rule he did briefly, his opinions often grated on the ears of the Western leaders. Although his phrases in themselves were not harsh, still less crude, and he was tactful, what he said made a powerful impression.

It was striking that, while Roosevelt reacted to Stalin's remarks calmly, even with understanding, Churchill did so with barely concealed irritation. The British Prime Minister tried not to show his feelings, but his cigars gave him away. He smoked far more of them when he was tense or excited. The number of his cigar stubs was in direct proportion to the stresses of the meeting. Everyone noticed it, and mocking remarks were made about it behind his back.

It should be said in fairness that Stalin had a liking for Roosevelt—which could not be said about his attitude towards the British Prime Minister. To some extent he may have been showing sympathy for the President's infirmity, but I and other Soviet officials were convinced that a more important reason for this difference of attitude had to do with the politics of the two Western leaders.

I cannot remember a single occasion at the conference when Stalin misheard or misunderstood a major statement from either of his two partners. His memory worked like a computer and missed nothing. As never before, during the sessions in the Livadiya Palace, I came to realise just what extraordinary qualities this man possessed.

Stalin made sure that every member of the Soviet delegation was fully informed about what he regarded as the most important tasks facing the conference. He ran the work of the delegation
with an assurance which conveyed itself to all of us, especially those sitting at the conference table.

Despite the lack of time, Stalin still found opportunities to talk with those within the delegation who were able, because of their position, to express a judgement or maintain contact with the Americans and British. These internal meetings varied in size, depending on the circumstances. On one occasion Stalin arranged a sort of cocktail party, during which he exchanged a few words with each member of the Soviet delegation, moving about slowly and with a pensive look on his face. From time to time he came to life and even made a joke. He knew everyone by sight; in fact, it was a matter of pride to him that he knew a great many people and could remember their names and often where he had met them. It would always impress.

Stalin moved on from group to group, stopping to ask questions. It was noticeable that he himself said very little, but listened attentively to what the others were saying. I had the feeling he was working all the time, preparing himself for the next meeting of the Big Three.

Approaching me, Stalin asked, ‘What are the main social elements that Roosevelt can count on for support inside his country?’

I replied: ‘The American President above all defends the interests of his own class, of course – the bourgeoisie. His domestic policies may encroach to some extent on the interests of the large monopolies, and right-wing extremists sometimes make the absurd accusation that he is sympathetic to socialism, but it’s only a propaganda ploy by people who don’t want the USA to have good relations with the USSR.’ After a short pause, I summed up my answer: ‘At the moment, Roosevelt as President has no rival. He feels secure.’

As far as I could judge, it was to these words that Stalin attended most of all.

Stalin also organised an official dinner for Churchill and Roosevelt to which the core personnel of the three delegations were also invited. There were not too many people present and one could hear everything anyone said. Naturally, everyone was keen to hear whatever the three leaders would say. Stalin was lively and made jokes, provoking friendly laughter which helped to produce a relaxed atmosphere. Major questions were not discussed during the dinner, and mostly the three leaders threw short, pithy comments back and forth. In essence, they were agreeing that they must secure a rapid end to the destruction being wrought by Hitler’s army and do their best to see that Germany never rose again as an aggressor.

I do recall one of Stalin’s less formal remarks during the dinner, however: ‘History has recorded many meetings of statesmen following a war. When the guns fall silent, the war seems to have made these leaders wise, and they tell each other they want to live in peace. But then, after a little while, despite all their mutual assurances, another war breaks out. Why is this? It is because some of them change their attitudes after they have achieved peace. We must try to see that doesn’t happen to us in the future.’

Roosevelt said, ‘I agree with you entirely. The nations can only be grateful for your words. All they want is peace.’

At that moment, Churchill was in conversation with Molotov and so did not join in.

Everyone at the Yalta conference knew that the decisions taken in the Livadiya Palace had immense significance for the peaceful future of Europe. We felt we were at the focus of history and that Justice was standing by, scales in hand.

The three historic personalities, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, together possessed immense power and influence. How much more they could have done, had there been sufficient agreement. Sadly, however, there were many questions on which they did not agree. The issue of German reparations to the USSR, in particular, was never resolved. Stalin and the rest of the Soviet delegation wondered what Roosevelt and Churchill were thinking when they dismissed this question. Didn’t they realise that, if the Germans were made to pay even twenty or thirty billion dollars, it would represent no more than a drop in the ocean? The damage they had done to our country was later assessed at 2600 billion roubles, so were our allies perhaps thinking that the Soviet economy should not be allowed to recover too quickly?

Each of the three leaders spoke several times on this issue, the President less than the others. Although he was ready to admit the possibility of some nominal compensation, he could not name a sum. He also avoided direct confrontation with Churchill, who was not willing to concede even a symbolic gesture of reparations for the USSR.

When all three men had made their positions clear, Stalin leaned towards me and asked in a low voice: ‘What should I make of
Roosevelt? Does he really disagree with Churchill, or is it just a ploy?'

A tricky question. Still, I gave him my opinion: ‘There are differences between them, but one must be aware that he is correct in his behaviour towards the British Prime Minister. Even so, that same correctness would never stop him bringing unofficial pressure on Churchill. If he hasn’t done this, I hardly think it’s accidental.’

Stalin seemed to share my assessment. When the session was over and we were getting up, he said quietly, as if to himself, ‘It's possible the USA and Britain have already agreed on this with each other.’

This suspicion was to be confirmed later, at the Potsdam conference, when the Americans joined the British in refusing to discuss Soviet reparations seriously and the USSR faced opposition from both powers. True, Roosevelt was not at Potsdam, his place having been filled by Truman. I doubt if Roosevelt’s carefully vague remarks at Yalta caused his successor at Potsdam much difficulty.

Similarly, Churchill’s position was endorsed by the Labour government which came to power in Britain during the Potsdam conference. Although the Labour leaders, Attlee and Bevin, had often spoken in the Soviet Union’s favour about her terrible war losses, at Potsdam – now Prime Minister and Foreign Minister respectively – their vocabulary had altered and they were far more sparing in their generosity.

During the Yalta conference, Stalin was living in the old Yusupov Palace, in the village of Koreiz, a short distance from the Livadiya Palace. There he had his study where he received delegation members and held meetings. The ambassador to Britain, F.T. Gusev, and I had rooms in an adjoining wing and were often in Stalin’s study.

In the early evening, and sometimes the morning too, General Antonov arrived to discuss the situation on the front. As a delegate I was present at one such meeting, and for the first time I was able to watch Stalin following the war news. It was obvious from his demeanour that he was pleased with the situation. He questioned Antonov about particular military formations and it became plain the plan of attack by our forces had already been drawn up and approved. Neither Antonov nor Stalin mentioned our losses, but clearly the enemy was retreating, and fast.

Stalin asked, ‘How well equipped are our forces for the operations in Poland?’

Antonov had evidently foreseen this question: ‘They have what they need. But it won’t be easy – the enemy will put up desperate resistance, as he knows the loss of Poland will have disastrous consequences for the Nazi leadership.’

The military surveys gave us all a much needed boost. Serious political clashes had begun to take place in our meetings at the Livadiya Palace. One morning, before leaving Koreiz for Livadia, I was in my room and got a call to report to Stalin at once.

He was alone when I arrived in his study. I greeted him and asked, ‘The beginning of the conference seems very tense – how are you feeling?’

Stalin replied, ‘I feel perfectly normal.’

I realised he was worrying about other things than the state of his health. A special messenger had just delivered an urgent letter in English for him, and he handed it to me.

‘This is from Roosevelt,’ he said. ‘I want to know what he says before the session begins.’

I gave him an impromptu translation and he occasionally asked me to repeat a phrase. The letter was about the Kurile Islands and Sakhalin. Roosevelt reported that the US government recognised the USSR’s right to the half of the islands of Sakhalin and the Kuriles under Japanese occupation.

Stalin was very pleased. He paced the room, repeating, ‘Good, very good!’

I observed: ‘In the 1905 peace talks after the Russo-Japanese war the USA helped the Japanese to annex considerable Russian territory. But presumably this new US position rehabilitates them in our eyes, as it were, after the support they gave Japan then?’

He seemed to agree that America had ‘rehabilitated’ itself. After a few seconds, as he pondered the contents of the letter, he spoke his thoughts: ‘This is an important letter. The Americans recognise the justice of our position on Sakhalin and the Kuriles. Now in return they will try to insist on our participation in the war against Japan. But that’s another question altogether.’

I noticed that something else seemed to be bothering him. ‘May I go now, Comrade Stalin?’ I asked.

But he suddenly shot a question at me: ‘Tell me, what do you think of Roosevelt? Is he clever?’

The question did not surprise me, as I knew I was not the first
man he had asked. Also I knew from the many letters from Stalin
I had passed to Roosevelt that even when Stalin did not take the
same position as the President, he held him in high regard.

I replied: 'Comrade Stalin, Roosevelt is a highly intelligent,
very capable man. Just the fact that he got himself elected President
for a third and then a fourth term speaks for itself. Of course, he
was helped by the international situation. And a lot of it was also
due to the capable job the Democrats did in popularising his name.
But his talks on the radio, his “Fireside Chats”, also made a big
impact on millions of Americans.'

Stalin remarked laconically: 'That was smart of him. Yes, he
got everything right.'

He had what I would call a smile of solid satisfaction on his
face. It was an expression I had noticed when he was feeling good,
when the discussion was about someone to whom he was well
disposed. As I left him, I had the feeling that his positive response
to Roosevelt’s letter would have an influence on the session that
was to start in about an hour’s time.

Certain significant events had led up to the letter. Already, back
in Tehran, Roosevelt had asked Stalin about Soviet help in the
war against Japan. It became apparent then that the opening of a
second front by the Allies was being linked to the USSR’s willing­
ness to help the USA in the East. The USA and USSR reached
an understanding in principle on that occasion, but it was not
regarded as a firm agreement, and the final word on the question
was not given until after Roosevelt’s letter about Sakhalin and
the Kuriles. That was why, in my opinion, Stalin was so pleased
by Roosevelt’s letter. Several times he walked across the room
with it, as if he didn’t want to let go of it, and he was still holding
it when I left him.

That day I watched Stalin and Roosevelt with special attention.
I thought they must both be thinking that they had bridged an
important divide, and it may be that the position taken by the US
President and his administration on Sakhalin and the Kuriles, as
well as on the second front, to some extent explains Stalin’s
favourable attitude to Roosevelt as a person.

The conference also spent a lot of time on Poland’s future
frontiers and the composition of her government. It was decided
that the frontier should follow the old Curzon Line, with some
adjustment in Poland’s favour. There was no serious disagreement
over the need for Poland to acquire some territorial additions in
the north and west, although there was disagreement over their
extent.

The Soviet side proposed that Poland’s western border be the
Oder–Neisse line. However, the Americans and British opposed
this on the dubious grounds that the Polish population would not
be able to master the resources of the new territories, and the Yalta
conference was thus unable to fix Poland’s western frontier. This
would be done plainly and decisively at Potsdam, thanks to the
consistent position taken by the USSR.

Understandably, a sharp confrontation took place at Yalta over
the composition of the Polish government, since the question
concerned the political nature of a reborn Polish state in a strate­
gically important part of Europe.

The Soviet Union took the view that a future Poland must not
be governed by the people who had led her to a national cata­
trophe, but by the democratic forces that had fought against Hitler
to free their country and restore Polish statehood. It was perfectly
logical, therefore, that the USSR should recognise a provisional
government in Poland that would represent the interests of the
democratic forces. (On 21 April 1945 the Soviet Union concluded
a treaty of friendship, mutual aid and post-war co-operation with
that government.)

While not acknowledging the provisional government, the
Western powers did at least see the impracticability of returning
the exile government from London to Poland. Therefore at Yalta
Roosevelt and Churchill proposed the dissolution
of both the exile
and the provisional governments and the formation of a new
provisional government which would include the chief members
of the reactionary government in exile. Both Western leaders
defended this position stubbornly, aware that, though it rep­
resented for the West a rearguard action, it was an important one.

In seeking an understanding on this, the USSR was prepared to
compromise: the USSR and the democratic forces of Poland
agreed that the provisional government be supplemented with
uncompromised politicians both from within Poland and from
Polish exile circles. This became the basis of the resolution adopted
at Yalta. The USA and Britain recognised the new government
and withdrew recognition from the exile government, which then
ceased to exist.

At the conference, Stalin made an announcement about the
USSR’s approach to Poland: ‘Our concern is not simply that
Poland borders on our country, though that is important. The essence of the problem lies much deeper. Throughout history, Poland has served as a corridor for unfriendly armies to attack Russia. . . . Why have our enemies been able to pass through Poland so easily up to now? Above all, because Poland was weak. The Polish corridor cannot be physically closed by Russian forces from the outside . . . only . . . from the inside by Poland's own forces. And for that Poland must be strong. That is why the Soviet Union is interested in the creation of a strong, free and independent Poland.'

Then there came rumblings at the conference of difficulties over the creation of the United Nations. The conference at Dumbarton Oaks had decided many issues, but there was still the question of the veto and special rights for the permanent members of the Security Council. After discussion, the three leaders agreed that a conference be held in San Francisco on 25 April 1945 to settle the final text of the UN Charter.

As soon as the conference was over, the world learned that a central problem discussed at Yalta was the future of Germany. The three leaders had reached understanding on Germany's unconditional surrender and on laying the foundations for the democratisation and demilitarisation of the country. Prompted by the Soviet Union, the parties solemnly declared that it was not their aim to destroy the German people, but that only when German militarism and Nazism had been uprooted would the Germans be able to enjoy a peaceful, dignified life and take a respected place among the other nations.

The final conference document, 'Unity in the Organisation of Peace as in the Conduct of War', represented an agreement between the three leaders to preserve and strengthen in peacetime the collaboration that had existed during the war. The outcome of the conference meant the final collapse of Hitler's hopes for an Allied split. Instead it was the Third Reich that broke apart and was consumed in the flames of war.

There have been attempts now and then to present the decisions of the Yalta conference as if they were intended to carve Europe up into spheres of influence for the great powers. This is pure fantasy.

As if foreseeing the possibility of future slanders against the conference, President Roosevelt told the US Congress: 'This conference means the end of the system of unilateral action, closed alliances, spheres of influence and all the political intrigue that was indulged in for centuries.' It was well said.

If they are objective about the conference, politicians today cannot but admit its historical importance for Europe and the world as a whole. The three powers agreed: to bring to an end Nazi Germany's violence; to convene a United Nations conference to create an international organisation for the preservation of peace; to establish in this new organisation the principle of unanimity of the powers through their permanent membership of the Security Council; to adopt a declaration to co-ordinate their actions in solving the problems of a liberated Europe. The three powers also agreed on the treatment of Germany after her unconditional surrender and on the just and immediate punishment of war criminals; on the creation in Germany of three special zones for the three powers, plus France; and on Far-Eastern questions.

German reparations to the USSR, the Polish question and Poland's borders were not finally agreed at Yalta, but the discussions there played their part, especially on the Polish question, which would be settled at Potsdam.

One can feel the anger in the statements of some Western politicians who claim that the USA and Britain made unjustified concessions to the USSR. They should read what their fathers and grandfathers said and wrote during the war in praise of the Soviet people's sacrifices for the sake of victory over the common enemy. The Soviet Union honestly carried out its duty as an ally, both on the battlefield and at the conference table.