

Book Review: Nigel Hamilton, *War and Peace*

James D. Perry

Institute for the Study of Strategy and Politics

The third volume of Nigel Hamilton's FDR trilogy, *War and Peace*, examines the period from the Tehran Conference to Roosevelt's death.¹ Fortunately, this book features far less of the rampant intellectual dishonesty that marred the second volume. Unfortunately, Hamilton continues to lack understanding of Roosevelt and Churchill's war aims. He also displays a complete lack of objectivity about his subjects, as he remains excessively critical of Churchill and excessively uncritical of Roosevelt.

The book begins with an incorrect interpretation of why Stalin agreed to meet at Tehran. Hamilton argues that Stalin wished to prevent the British from backing out of D-Day, as the author wrongly insists they were "plotting" to do. In fact, Stalin finally agreed to a summit, which he had long put off, because Italy surrendered and the Anglo-Americans had landed in Italy. Stalin thus needed to reach agreement with them on the shape of post-war Europe, including the treatment of Germany and eastern Europe.

Hamilton argues that in October 1943, Churchill asked his Chiefs of Staff to study invading the Balkans in 1944 and to postpone Overlord "if possible to 1945" (p. 21). His source,

¹ Nigel Hamilton, *War and Peace* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2019).

Martin Gilbert's biography of Churchill, does *not* say Churchill wanted to postpone Overlord until 1945.² Hamilton does not mention passages from Gilbert that indicate Churchill did not want to postpone Overlord to 1945. For example, Gilbert quotes Churchill telling King George VI and Anthony Eden that Britain could not abandon its commitment to launch Overlord in 1944.³ Churchill did not neglect essential preparations for launching Overlord in 1944.⁴ Gilbert states that Churchill contemplated delaying Overlord "perhaps till July" of 1944, not until 1945 as Hamilton claims.⁵

Hamilton views Churchill's obsession with Rhodes in late 1943 as the product of an amateurish "meddler" who angered Roosevelt for no good reason. The author does not perceive that Churchill's interest in the Aegean reflected his vision for the postwar world. Conquering the Aegean would open the door to entering the Balkans and introducing Anglo-American political influence to counter the Soviets. Whether or not this strategy was viable militarily is not the point. Churchill was not an erratic opportunist, as Hamilton portrays him, but sought to use military power to achieve his political objectives.

Hamilton attacks Churchill for sending a cable to Anthony Eden containing a battlefield report that Eisenhower had sent to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The author claims Churchill wanted Eden to use this report to convince Stalin that a delay in Overlord

² Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Road to Victory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 533.

³ *Ibid.*, 531, 544.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 537.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 544.

was needed. Hamilton characterizes Churchill's use of this cable as improper and deceitful. As the British were members of the Combined Chiefs, it was not improper at all for them to circulate this cable however they wished. Moreover, the British were hardly going "behind the President's back." Eden was at the Moscow Foreign Minister's Conference, where Secretary of State Cordell Hull led the American delegation. Hamilton provides no discussion of this important conference and takes this cable out of context for no other reason than to snipe at Churchill.⁶

Hamilton argues that this episode showed Stalin that the Western Allies were disunited when such unity was "vital" (p. 31). The author does not understand that before Tehran, Roosevelt purposely emphasized to Stalin that he and Churchill were not united. Then, at Tehran, Roosevelt invited Stalin to unite with him to the disadvantage of the British.

Hamilton notes that the British Chiefs of Staff informed Churchill that "we do not attach vital importance to any particular date" for Overlord. The author considers this "a lamentable performance" because "the chiefs seemed to have no idea how important it would be to launch the assault in spring, to give the Allies a full summer to develop their campaign" (p. 37). Hamilton fails to quote his source fully, which states that the British Chiefs emphasized "our agreed intention to attack the Germans across the Channel in the late spring or early summer of 1944."⁷ As subsequent events showed, delaying Overlord to early June still provided ample time for campaigning.

⁶ On this conference see Keith Sainsbury, *The Turning Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 36–109.

⁷ Arthur Bryant, *Triumph in the West* (London: Collins, 1959), 64.

Hamilton wonders rhetorically why Churchill wanted to “ditch” Overlord in favor of further Mediterranean operations; “what was the Prime Minister playing at?” (p. 44) Why did his military chiefs and war cabinet follow him? Firstly, contrary to Hamilton’s repeated assertions over hundreds of pages, Churchill did not want to abandon Overlord, just postpone it. Secondly, in asking such questions, Hamilton reveals his ignorance of British war aims, which explain Churchill’s desire to postpone Overlord and expand Mediterranean operations.⁸ The author’s ignorance of British war aims reduces him to fatuous speculation, such as when he attributes the British desire to delay Overlord to cowardice (pp. 91, 113).

Hamilton correctly observes that Roosevelt behaved in a deceitful and underhanded way towards the British at Cairo—stonewalling the British and using Chiang Kai-shek to divert attention to Asian issues (p. 84). He cites General Brooke’s lament that this prevented the creation of a “united front to Stalin” (p. 86). The author does not see that FDR deliberately avoided creating a united front against Stalin. In contrast to the author’s previous severe criticism of Churchill for his allegedly improper, deceitful, and treacherous behavior towards Roosevelt, he approvingly considers Roosevelt’s tactics necessary for winning the war.

Hamilton accurately argues that Roosevelt went to Tehran in order to promote his vision of the postwar world. Sadly, the author does not understand Roosevelt’s vision for the postwar world, or Churchill or Stalin’s visions either. Thus, his analysis of Tehran is extremely weak. In Hamilton’s view, FDR wanted to “nudge” Churchill and Stalin “toward a postwar

⁸ British aims are well explained in Sainsbury, *The Turning Point*, 21-31.

democratic vision” and to encourage them to participate in the postwar United Nations (p. 97). He argues that FDR believed “the May 1944 timing of Overlord was crucial” to convincing the American people to play an active role in postwar world politics. If the British postponed Overlord in favor of the Balkans, then the American people might “turn away from Europe, once again, as after 1918” (p. 98). Hamilton’s source for this claim is a memorandum from Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy.⁹ This memorandum concerns the recommendation at the Moscow Foreign Minister’s conference to set up a European Advisory Commission in London to make recommendations on postwar occupation policy. In the passages Hamilton quotes, McCloy noted the disadvantages of basing the EAC in London, and advised that all important decisions should be made in Washington. Nowhere in the memorandum did McCloy discuss Overlord or state that “Churchill’s current antics were, in McCloy’s eyes... profoundly dangerous” as Hamilton contends (pp. 98-99). In short, Hamilton is misusing this source, which does not support his argument for why Roosevelt thought a May 1944 Overlord was crucial.

It is hardly convincing that delaying Overlord a month or two would cause the American people to reject involvement in the postwar world. Nonetheless, most of Hamilton’s discussion of Tehran revolves around the timing of Overlord. This is not to say that Overlord and the United Nations were not important issues at Tehran, only that they were subsidiary to the strategies

⁹ “The Assistant Secretary of War (McCloy) to the President’s Special Assistant (Hopkins), 25 November 1943,” *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943, ed. William M. Franklin and William Gerber (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), Document 316:415-422.

and war aims of the principal actors. Proper understanding of those issues provides a correct framework for analysis.¹⁰

When Hamilton describes FDR's pre-Tehran meeting with the Joint Chiefs, he misrepresents what the source says. For example, the author writes that FDR thought that operations in the Aegean would not draw away German troops from the Eastern Front, but FDR did not say this. (FDR actually asked how America and Britain would respond if the Soviets urged them to stop the Germans from sending troops to the Eastern Front from the Balkans and Aegean.) He claims the President said "no major operations elsewhere should be countenanced" before Overlord (p. 104) – but FDR did not say this at all. He asserts that Roosevelt said that intervention in Greece would require the cancellation of Overlord – but FDR did not say this either.¹¹

Hamilton describes the private conversation between FDR and Stalin at Tehran in which Roosevelt proposed taking India away from the British as well as punishing the French. In all three books, Hamilton repeatedly attacks Churchill for allegedly treacherous betrayals of Roosevelt. Yet Hamilton voices no criticism of Roosevelt for conniving with Stalin to dismember the British Empire – a remarkable betrayal of Churchill – not to mention the shocking ignorance of FDR's ideas about India.

¹⁰ See Richard C. Thornton, "FDR's New World Order: A Chimerical Vision," *Journal of Strategy and Politics*, Issue 1 (Winter 2014).

¹¹ Hamilton's source is "'Eureka' Conference, Minutes of Meeting between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff [...] 26 November 1943," archived online at http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/mr/mr0130.pdf (pages 54 to 59 of the pdf).

Hamilton's discussion of the first tripartite meeting misses the crucial point that Roosevelt deliberately allowed Stalin to decide Anglo-American strategy.¹² The author scoffs at the idea that Stalin rejected Churchill's proposals for Mediterranean operations due to his "secret plans for postwar Russian hegemony" (p. 116) or that the Americans and Soviets had colluded beforehand. The Americans and Soviets agreed, in the author's view, solely because their ideas aligned on the "clear military strategy" of "how best to defeat Nazi Germany" (p. 117). Roosevelt knew what Stalin wanted before they went to Tehran; Stalin had repeatedly conveyed his wishes through intermediaries. The idea that FDR did not understand that allowing Stalin to veto Mediterranean operations at Tehran conceded Soviet control of eastern Europe is simply absurd.

Hamilton considers Churchill entirely to blame for the failure to appoint an Overlord commander before Tehran. In his view, "the real reason no commander had been appointed" was that FDR refused to appoint Marshall "unless the British agreed to the mounting of the operation on May 1, 1944" (p. 129). Hamilton scoffs at Churchill's effort to "disclaim responsibility" when he told Stalin that FDR would make the decision because the commander would be American. But this was nothing less than the truth. Appointing the commander was Roosevelt's privilege, and he was solely responsible for not doing so. Prior to Tehran, Churchill repeatedly asked FDR to name a commander.¹³ To blame Churchill for FDR's failure to decide is ridiculous.

The author argues that "Second Cairo" was "white-washed by Churchill" and largely overlooked by historians.

¹² See Sainsbury, *The Turning Point*, chap. 8.

¹³ See Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Road to Victory*, 531, 537-539, 545.

Hamilton correctly notes that at Second Cairo, FDR betrayed his commitment to Chiang Kai-shek at First Cairo for an operation in the Bay of Bengal, but blames this on Churchill. The author fails to note that Roosevelt had *already* betrayed Chiang at Tehran when he offered Stalin a dominant postwar position in Manchuria contrary to his promise to Chiang at First Cairo.

Hamilton repeatedly emphasizes that the Anzio assault was “futile” and “unnecessary” (pp. 154, 196) and describes it in wholly negative terms (blunder, disaster, amateurish, criminal, calamity, catastrophe). Such hyperbole would be justified if the strenuous German effort to liquidate the beachhead had succeeded. However, the Germans failed, at heavy cost; the author stresses Allied casualties but neglects to mention that the Germans suffered *even more* casualties, which they could afford far less than the Allies could. In May, the Allies broke out and took Rome. Thus, Anzio was a victory, not a disaster. Anzio did not achieve its goals as rapidly as hoped, but then, neither did Torch or Overlord. Like Anzio, Overlord was stalemated for months with heavy casualties before the Allies broke out, but Hamilton certainly does not describe Overlord as a failure or a debacle.

Hamilton rejects Anzio as unnecessary but does not analyze the alternatives. Further frontal assaults south of Rome would have incurred at least as many casualties as Anzio if they succeeded at all. Going over to the defensive would mean the Allies did nothing for months before Overlord, and would release German reserves for action elsewhere. In his previous book, Hamilton noted that Roosevelt rejected inaction, and wanted to maintain the initiative in Italy.¹⁴ Earlier in this book, the author referred to “Eisenhower’s strategy of fighting in Italy to tie down

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, 294-296.

German forces” (p. 70). Anzio was consistent with what the author believes Roosevelt and Eisenhower wanted. One can only conclude that Hamilton portrays Anzio in totally negative terms because Churchill was the driving force behind it. Hamilton constantly reviles Churchill in all three books, perhaps in order to contrast him with the supposed strategic genius of FDR. In keeping with his uncritical view of FDR, the author insists that Roosevelt and his chiefs had no responsibility for the “failure at Anzio” (p. 247). This is false. Americans commanded the attack (Fifth Army under Mark Clark and VI Corps under John Lucas), contributed most of the forces, and took most of the casualties. Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs were absolutely responsible for what US forces did, or failed to do. If they regarded Anzio as a failure, they should have relieved Clark, but they did not.

The author describes at considerable length FDR’s poor health in early to mid-1944. This is useful because few studies of FDR acknowledge how seriously ill he was. The President’s doctors described him as “dying” in March 1944 (p. 222). He periodically lost consciousness and was unable to focus (p. 238), and could only work for a few hours a day. His condition was obvious to those around him, even though he and his staff lied to the press about it. He had serious “heart failure” in July and an actual heart attack in Seattle in August (pp. 291, 328).

This health crisis came as the President was deciding whether to run for reelection. FDR knew he had no hope of serving another full term, and might not even survive to the end of his current term (pp. 257, 282). Nevertheless, he chose to conceal his condition and run again. Roosevelt believed that he was indispensable—only he, with his personal relationship with Stalin, could guide the nation successfully into the postwar world. FDR considered that his opponent, Thomas E. Dewey, could not

be trusted to do so. The author accurately depicts the President's beliefs, but is remarkably uncritical of these beliefs, especially when compared to the copious scorn he heaps on Churchill as a man, strategist, and politician. For a mortally ill President to run for another term, and to represent the nation at important international conferences, was fundamentally irresponsible and egotistical. The reader is left with the impression that Hamilton agrees that Roosevelt was, indeed, indispensable.

Hamilton regards the conference at Quebec in 1944 as "not necessary." He considers the reason for holding it "a mystery" and concludes that Roosevelt attended in order to avoid campaigning against Dewey. This again shows the author's lack of understanding of strategy and war aims. Roosevelt went to Quebec in order to maintain the cohesion of the alliance, which had seriously frayed since Tehran due to the incompatible British and American war aims.

Hamilton misrepresents the Mackenzie King diary about Quebec. He contends that King opposed an invasion of the Adriatic in order to capture Vienna because this would require Canada to introduce conscription (p. 350). In King's diary for September 1944, he did not say Canada needed conscription for Adriatic operations, and did not oppose such operations.¹⁵ Hamilton sneers at Churchill's desire to restore British authority in Asia on the grounds that Churchill had not visited India since 1899 and never visited China at all. Yet Hamilton never criticizes

¹⁵ Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Library and Archives Canada <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/diaries-william-lyon-mackenzie-king.aspx>. Discussion of the Adriatic is in items 27203 -27205 and 27222-27223.

Roosevelt for making decisions that profoundly affected both those countries without ever visiting either of them.

Hamilton depicts Churchill's interest in an Adriatic assault and a drive on Vienna as a typically irresponsible and unrealistic flight of fancy. The author is unaware that Roosevelt invited Churchill to Quebec *specifically* in order to discuss Trieste and Istria.¹⁶ Thus, for Churchill to discuss Adriatic operations was entirely reasonable. Hamilton scoffs at Churchill's desire to capture Vienna and Singapore. He describes this as a diversion from "the most important goal of the Western Allies: *defeating Hitler*" (p. 355). But neither the United States nor the USSR was *solely* concerned with defeating Hitler. In late 1944, both intended to use military operations to shape the postwar world to their advantage. Britain had every right to attempt to do the same. Singapore was a perfectly valid British objective from a military and political standpoint. Hamilton's criticism that Churchill was willing to suffer "unnecessary casualties" to take Singapore (p. 356) contrasts oddly with his previous complaint that Churchill shrank from Overlord due to his cowardly fear of British casualties.

Hamilton completely misses the point of the Quebec military discussions. He argues that FDR acted to ensure that "all British diversions had successfully been squashed" (p. 358, 363). Far from it. In fact, Roosevelt offered Churchill everything he wanted, including capturing Berlin and Vienna before the Soviets, keeping U.S. forces in Italy strong, planning for an amphibious assault on Istria and retaining amphibious lift for that purpose, bringing the British Fleet and Bomber Command into the Pacific

¹⁶ "President Roosevelt to Prime Minister Churchill, 30 August 1944," *FRUS*, Conference at Quebec, 1944, ed. Richardson Dougall et al. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), Document 38:24.

to attack Japan, continued lend-lease, and postwar support to British power. The price for this was Churchill's support for the Morgenthau Plan, but it was an offer Churchill couldn't refuse.¹⁷ And Roosevelt would later pull the rug out from under Churchill regarding the capture of Berlin and Vienna.

Hamilton contends that in the aftermath of Second Quebec, Roosevelt was "gaga"—past a "point of no return," his mind in "severe decline," and a "figurehead" with Admiral Leahy as his "caretaker" (pp. 367, 371-372). Yet the author does not therefore conclude that Roosevelt had no business running for re-election or traveling to Yalta to negotiate with Stalin. Indeed, the author rejects the idea that FDR should have resigned in favor of Truman — "no one else" had Roosevelt's prestige or could get Churchill and Stalin to agree on a "new world order" (p. 387). Nor does Hamilton make the obvious point that what Roosevelt did at Yalta was consistent with what he did at Tehran, and thus his diplomacy at Yalta was not the product of mental decline.

Hamilton's analysis of Yalta, like his analysis of Tehran, suffers from his basic lack of understanding of what Roosevelt was trying to achieve. Roosevelt offered Stalin a world of Soviet-American cooperation, with Germany and Japan divided and disarmed, and Soviet security guaranteed by the creation of pro-Soviet buffer states in Eastern Europe, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Korea. Hamilton shows no recognition of this, or of the fact that the secret agreements at Yalta contravened Roosevelt's earlier promises to Chiang Kai-shek regarding Manchuria and Korea. In

¹⁷ See Thornton, "FDR's New World Order," 32-39.

truth, Roosevelt had made a bad bargain, giving away too much, and Truman was correct to revise it.¹⁸

Many historians argued immediately after World War II that the Americans had naively pursued “purely military” objectives during the war, while the devious British and Soviets pursued postwar political advantage. Hamilton’s trilogy is redolent of this attitude, although he does not even credit Churchill with political motives for straying from the “correct” path of military victory over Germany. A great deal of information has come to light since 1945 to show that Roosevelt’s vision for postwar world order guided his decisions on military operations. Works like Hamilton’s trilogy that do not reflect this information are simply inadequate seventy-five years after FDR’s death.

¹⁸ See Richard C. Thornton, “Truman and the Pacific War End Game,” *Journal of Strategy and Politics*, Issue 1 (Winter 2014).