

A NEW LOOK AT CHURCHILL'S 'IRON CURTAIN' SPEECH

HENRY B. RYAN

I

Churchill's 'iron curtain' speech at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946, was a major effort to promote both a strengthened Anglo-American combination and a firmer western front against the Soviet Union. In the months between his electoral defeat and his talk at Fulton he had viewed Soviet consolidation in Europe with continuing concern, probably coupled with despair at his own inability to do very much about it.¹ This presidential invitation, however, to deliver an address at an American college could provide a means to push to the fore the policies that he believed in. Certainly, the effect of his talk can be overestimated, but, despite its failure to create the very close alignment Churchill hoped for with the United States, it undoubtedly contributed to hardening western positions towards the Soviets.

A study of the speech and its background reveals a good deal about the political atmosphere at the time. Furthermore, by examining the preparations for the talk, we can correct much misleading comment stating or suggesting that the US government did not know its content in advance and that the British government did. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Unquestionably the American administration knew what Churchill was going to say, and almost surely HMG, at least Whitehall, did not.

The British embassy in Washington saw, and surely correctly, the latter part of 1945, after Churchill was defeated and the war ended, as a period in which the United States was somewhat adrift in foreign-policy terms.² Nevertheless, at that time a firmer line toward the Soviets was gradually emerging in Washington. Those months also marked the beginning of an era in the US that would be much more receptive than Roosevelt's had been to Churchill's policy of confrontation towards the Soviet Union if not to his dreams of partnership with the United States. But, ironically perhaps, the government of his own country, the new Labour govern-

¹ For a description of his mood, see Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: the struggle for survival, 1940-1965* (London, 1968, paperback edn), pp. 311-44. See also Daniel Yergin, *The shattered peace: the origins of the cold war and the national security state* (Boston, 1977), pp. 174-5.

² Good examples of this view are provided in F.O. 371-44539, paper AN 3373 and AN 3657, weekly political summaries dated 5 Nov. and a Dec. 1945, respectively. Unless otherwise stated, manuscript material referred to in this article is located in the Public Record Office.

ment, though in a formative period itself in 1945 and early 1946, was at least trying to base its foreign policy upon support for the United Nations and so to emphasize multilateral security and peacekeeping efforts. Attlee had once stated, for example, 'The British Empire can only be defended by its membership of the United Nations Organization', and both Bevin and Hector McNell had made clear to parliament HMG's hopes for such a policy.² Furthermore, in September 1945 Bevin, worried that US designs for airbases in Iceland would cause the Soviets to seek similar facilities in Scandinavia, made this revealing statement to Attlee: 'We might thus get straight back to the worst form of power politics and armed neutrality. The chances of organizing world security on an international basis through the Security Council would be gravely prejudiced and the relevant provisions of the Charter might remain a dead letter.'³ At first blush one is tempted to think that this must be someone in Roosevelt's administration, with its stress on a world peacekeeping organization, talking about HMG, with its traditional reliance on properly balanced spheres of influence.

The fact seems to be, however, that during the latter half of 1945 the United States and British governments were somewhat switching positions. It would be a mistake to overstress this or to make it seem too neat, but Attlee's government had come closer to Roosevelt's position in international affairs than Churchill's ever did, while Truman's administration was drifting towards Churchillian notions of confrontation. Moreover, once that administration became convinced that such a policy was necessary, that Roosevelt's one-world approach needed to be abandoned, it gained public acceptance for the change to a significant extent through Churchill's efforts. As will be documented later, he remained an enormously heroic figure in the United States, both in his own right and as a friend and partner of Franklin Roosevelt, and he was probably more able to promote the desired change in American foreign policy, or perhaps better to say to legitimize the change already in process, than any other human being. It is again ironical that Americans, with all their apparent wariness of British influence in their politics, backed a policy change of dramatic proportions to a significant extent on Churchill's recommendation.

In the 'iron curtain' speech Churchill tried to drive home to Americans his two main points about international politics: the need for an Anglo-American combination and the menace of the Soviet Union. He said:

Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and empire and the United States of America.

² See *Cab. 129*, vol. 1, C.P. (43) 144, memorandum, 1 Sept. 1945 for Attlee's statement; *Harvard* vol. 419, cols. 1363-6 for Bevin's made on 21 Feb. 1946; and vol. 420, col. 749 for McNell's made on 11 Mar. 1946.

³ PREM 8 (349), minute, 27 Sept. 1945.

Fraternal association requires... the continuance of the intimate relationships between our military advisers... the continuance of the present facilities for mutual security....

This would perhaps double the mobility of the American navy and air force. It would greatly expand that of the British empire forces and it might well lead, if and as the world calms down, to important financial savings....

Eventually there may come, I feel eventually there will come, the principle of common citizenship, but that we may be content to leave to destiny, whose outstretched arm so many of us can already clearly see....

Beware, I say; time is plenty short....

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lightened, lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its communist international organization intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytizing tendencies....

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe....

From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness....

If the population of the English-speaking Commonwealth be added to that of the United States, with all such cooperation implies in the air, on the sea, all over the globe, and in science and in industry, and in moral force, there will be no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security.⁴

The development of the powerful 'iron curtain' image is perhaps worth a few words here. Lady Snowden used it as early as 1920 when with a Labour party delegation she arrived in the new Soviet Union. 'We were', she said, 'behind the "iron curtain" at last!' The fact that she put the phrase in inverted commas may indicate that it had some currency even then.⁵ Disasteful as the fact may be, one of the earliest public usages during World War II seems to have been by Joseph Goebbels writing in *Das Reich* of 24 February 1945. He warned that if the German people surrendered, the Yalta agreement would 'allow the Soviets to occupy all east and southeast Europe, together with the major part of the Reich. An iron curtain would at once descend on this territory which, including the Soviet Union, would be of enormous dimensions.'⁶ He seems to have been attracted to the image and used it again within less than a month, this time in his diary when speaking of Soviet policy in Roumania.⁷ There

⁴ The passages are quoted from the *New York Times*, 6 Mar. 1946, which recorded and transcribed the talk.

⁵ Mrs Philip (Ethel) Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia* (London, 1920), p. 32.

⁶ Martin F. Herz, *Beginnings of the cold war* (Bloomington, Ind., 1965), pp. 86 and 107, n. 20.

⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper (ed.), *The Goebbels diaries: the last days* (London, 1978), entry for 18 Mar. 1945. This entry can also be found in the *Observer*, which serialized this edition of the diaries. See the issue of 26 Feb. 1978.

is, however, no evidence that Churchill was aware of Goebbels' use of the phrase. He himself used it subsequently in two telegrams to Truman, one on 12 May 1945, which in his memoirs he calls the 'Iron Curtain' telegram,⁹ and another on 4 June 1945, both trying to 'stiffen' the president's attitude towards the Soviets.¹⁰ In addition, at the Potsdam conference he said 'an iron fence' had come down around western representatives in the Balkans, to which Stalin, incidentally, replied, 'all fairy tales'.¹¹ Churchill first used the image publicly in parliament on 16 August 1945, in what seems to have been the opening of an era of both anxious thinking and strong public phraseology in Britain and America in regard to conditions in eastern Europe.¹² Later Senator Vandenberg on 15 November 1945 inveighed against the 'iron curtain of secrecy' the Soviet Union had put between itself and the rest of the world.¹³ Finally, Churchill, in his famous address at Fulton, put the phrase into everyday speech.

But more important than the image are the ideas it was used to express which were coming to preoccupy Churchill during the year before the Fulton speech. This was apparent in various messages, especially in the spring of 1945, which demonstrated the development of his viewpoint toward the Soviet Union. Particularly notable in this regard was a long cable on 4 May to Eden at the San Francisco conference and written for Eden's use in conversations with American officials. It bore much of the thinking regarding developments in Europe and a hint of the phraseology that distinguished the Fulton speech. It said, for example, that the proposed withdrawal of the American army to zones agreed upon earlier 'would mean the tide of Russian domination sweeping forward 120 miles on a front of 300 or 400 miles... It would include all the great capitals of Middle Europe...'¹⁴

It is interesting also that Churchill, cabling Stalin on 29 April 1945, stressed the viewpoint of an entity he referred to variously as 'the English-speaking world', 'the English-speaking nations', and 'the English-speaking democracies'. The members of this collective, he said, not only looked at life in a common way, but were also leaders in what might become an uncomfortably divided world of 'the countries you dominate' and 'those who rally to the English-speaking nations and their associates or Dominions'.¹⁵ It may be a mistake to make too much of these particular expressions, but it does seem as though Churchill was already

⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (London, 1954), vi, 498.

¹⁰ PREM 3 (936/13), p. 1123.

¹¹ *Foreign relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 'Conference of Berlin (Potsdam) 1945', II, 302. See also Byrnes, *All in one lifetime* (New York, 1958), p. 293.

¹² *Hansard*, vol. 413, col. 83-4. See also the discussion in William H. McNell's *America, Britain and Russia: their co-operation and conflict, 1941-6* (London, 1953), p. 629.

¹³ *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 1945.

¹⁴ Churchill, *The Second World War*, vi, 437-9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 431-4.

calling a kind of Anglo-America union into existence to try to persuade Stalin to change his policies. Later, at Fulton he would suggest the union in a formal way. Here he seems to be acting as though it were already created, perhaps hoping that Stalin would think that that were the case. This was indeed neither a new hope nor expression for Churchill. What is significant, however, is that he stated the concept in a critical period, during an exacerbated exchange with Stalin over Poland as well as other troublesome issues in Europe, in the hope, one must assume, that it would change the course of Russian actions.

Meanwhile, evidence that tougher attitudes were emerging in America was furnished by a speech Truman made on 27 October 1945 in which he said the United States would maintain its military power and, with other like-minded nations, use force if necessary to ensure peace. Furthermore, the United States, he said, would not recognize a government imposed upon any nation by a foreign power, remarks he made in New York on the occasion of an enormous display of US Naval strength. Churchill told both the president and the house of commons how much he admired these comments, and in parliament emphasized the need for strong 'fraternal association' in terms similar to those he would use at Fulton.¹⁶

Regarding the international atmosphere before the Fulton speech, two other communications should perhaps be highlighted. One was Stalin's speech of 9 February 1946 before the elections for the Supreme Soviet, a speech which Dean Acheson, for example, says 'startled' Washington.¹⁷ Of particular concern in the west was his reaffirmation of the Marxist doctrine that war is inevitable among capitalist powers and his call for new increased quotas for pig iron, steel, coal and oil production so that the Soviet Union would 'be insured against any eventuality'.¹⁸ H. Freeman Matthews, director of the state department's office of European affairs, considered it an 'authoritative guide to post-war Soviet policy'.¹⁹ Following Stalin's speech and similar pre-election statements by other politburo members, plus evidence of Soviet unwillingness to participate in international economic institutions, Washington asked its embassy in Moscow for an analysis of what the United States government could expect from the Soviet Union. Thus originated the second of the two major pre-Fulton documents mentioned above, George Kennan's enormous telegram of 22 February analysing Russian history as well as Soviet attitudes and policies. Kennan, *chargé d'affaires* at the embassy, saw some

¹⁶ For Truman's speech, see *New York Times*, 28 Oct. 1945. Churchill's remarks to the house of commons can be found in *Hansard*, vol. 413, cols. 1290-1300, and to Truman in the Truman papers, Truman Library, Independence, Mo. (hereafter cited as 'Truman papers'), secretary's file (PSF), letter, 8 Nov. 1945.

¹⁷ Acheson, *Present at the creation* (London, 1970), p. 150.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 10 Feb. 1946, English text broadcast by Moscow radio.

¹⁹ *FRUS*, 1946, vi, 695 n.

of these, including the Soviet fear of and hostility towards the outside world, as direct descendants of the attitudes and policies of the czars. In addition, he said, the Kremlin believed that 'Everything must be done to advance relative strength of USSR as factor in international society. Conversely, no opportunity must be missed to reduce strength and influence, collectively as well as individually, of capitalist powers...'; and about the Soviet leaders he stated, 'in the name of Marxism they sacrificed every single ethical value... today they cannot dispense with it. It is fig leaf of their moral and intellectual respectability.'²⁶

His telegram played an important role in delineating thinking of American policymakers at a time when irritation with the Soviets had already become a major feature in east-west relations. Harriman, resigning his post as ambassador in Moscow, was in Washington when the Kennan telegram arrived and, knowing of Secretary of Navy James Forrestal's keen interest in Soviet affairs, sent him a copy. According to Harriman's memoirs Forrestal 'had it mimeographed and distributed to all members of the Truman Cabinet in any way concerned with foreign and military affairs'.²⁷ Indeed Harriman himself before he left Moscow had communicated his concern to Washington about the way relations with the Soviet Union were going and particularly about what he regarded to be a distorted image of the United States presented in Soviet media.²⁸

Meetings of the representatives of the wartime allies, e.g. the foreign ministers conferences and the first session of the UNO General Assembly in London, rather than improving relations seemed only to make matters worse. The UNO meeting must have been particularly disappointing, that organization having been awaited with such high hopes as the midwife for a new and better world. When the meeting ended Senator Vandenberg, an American delegate, although maintaining faith in the UNO, was clearly troubled, and said that not only must the United States 'speak as plainly upon all occasions as Russia does' but also must 'assume moral leadership'.²⁹ A week later Secretary of State Byrnes, clearly alluding to the problems with the Russians in Iran, Manchuria and eastern Europe, used rather more muscular language, implying that the United States might have to use force 'if force or the threat of force is used contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter [of the UNO]...'. 'If we are to be a great power' he said, 'we must act as a great power, not only in order to ensure our own security but in order to preserve the peace of the world'.³⁰

Bevin seems not to have been quite so far along the hard line path although his tactics had been extremely firm and blunt with the Soviets

²⁶ FRUS, 1946, vi, 696. George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston, 1967), pp. 392-5.

²⁷ W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (London, 1976), p. 548.

²⁸ FRUS, 1946, vi, 676.

²⁹ *New York Times*, 28 Feb. 1946.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1946.

from the time he took Eden's place at Potsdam following the British elections. In parliament on 21 February, less than two weeks before the Fulton speech, Bevin defended against critics in his own party the tough approach he had taken in the Security Council towards the Russians. But he also noted that it had sometimes been suggested that the western powers 'gang up against Russia' whereas he recommended instead to engage the Soviets in the Anglo-American pattern of discussion and exchange of information and invited them to join a British-American oil agreement as a starter.³¹ But perhaps one of the most significant points he made that day was to recommend extending the Anglo-Soviet friendship treaty, signed in 1942, from 20 to 50 years.³²

II

The first steps towards bringing Winston Churchill to Westminster College where the speech was made were taken by the college president, F. L. McCluer and Truman's aide, Brigadier General Harry Vaughan, a former Westminister classmate of McCluer's.³³ Following a meeting of these two with Truman, a letter dated 3 October 1945 proposing the talk went from McCluer to Churchill via the White House. Truman wrote with a pen on the bottom of the letter 'This is a wonderful school in my home state. Hope you can do it. I'll introduce you. Best regards - Harry S. Truman.'³⁴

Churchill wrote to T. L. Rowan, private secretary to Attlee and formerly to Churchill, on 26 October saying one Colonel Clarke, a Quebec City industrialist, had invited him and his wife to stay at his home in Florida for 'a couple of months' between January and April and that he was 'seriously considering this attractive plan'.³⁵ He added:

Also there has just come in the enclosed invitations from the Westminister College, Missouri, and the Association of American Colleges, Ohio. You will note the scribble in the corners of these two letters by President Truman... If the President would go to Missouri to meet me, I would certainly feel it my duty, if I were in America, to give them an address, of course without any fee.

Thus Churchill notified the British government that he was considering making a speech in America. He then asked how the prime minister and foreign minister would view such a trip. A few days later Attlee wired

³¹ *Hansard*, vol. 419, cols. 1363-6.

³² *Ibid.*, col. 1349.

³³ Truman papers, confidential file, letters, McCluer to Vaughan, 30 Nov. 1945 and Clark Clifford to Kenneth Marshall, 30 Apr. 1946. Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: the Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York, 1977), p. 190.

³⁴ Truman papers, official file; Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, p. 190. In his memoir Truman devotes only three sentences to the talk, pointing out simply the hostile Soviet reaction which he thought was intended to divert attention from Russian troop movements in Iran. See Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs* (2 vols., New York, paperback edn, 1965), II, 117.

³⁵ Attlee papers, University College, Oxford (hereafter cited as 'Attlee papers'), box 4, Churchill file. In the event, his daughter Sarah went also.

Lord Halifax, Britain's ambassador in Washington, asking his opinion,³⁰ and Halifax replied:

1. From this end I do not think any objection would arise to any part of the projected programme, and if as he doubtless would, Winston said the right sort of thing, I think it might have very good effect, particularly if he went to the Middle West as suggested. As you know, he is a very popular figure, and Great Britain would draw measure of reflected popularity.
2. You could I imagine feel assured that he would not say anything in public or private that would be embarrassing to you or His Majesty's Government.
3. There passes through my mind a hope that he will not bring Max.³¹

It is interesting to note Halifax's statement that if Churchill said 'the right sort of thing' it would have a 'good effect', as though he, Attlee, and Bevin all understood what the right sort of thing was and agreed. But likely Halifax was thinking simply that Churchill might say something to bolster British prestige, especially since the Middle West was sometimes regarded to be an area where hostility to Great Britain ran highest. Several months later Halifax, talking of the forthcoming speeches Churchill would make in the United States, told him that there was some feeling there that Great Britain was 'the tired oldster of the international scene' and that 'some reference to the reverse being true would be valuable'.³² Most likely this is what he had in mind also when he telegraphed Whitehall the previous October and spoke of Churchill saying 'the right sort of thing'.

Regardless of possible ambiguity about what he might say, Churchill received a letter from Rowan on 2 November 1945 stating: '...the Government would certainly favour your proposed visit to the United States of America... and would be glad to give you suitable facilities'.³³ During November Churchill wrote Truman, accepting tentatively. Truman ignored the tentative aspect of the acceptance and told Churchill he was happy he could come to the United States and give the speech, and reaffirmed his intention to introduce him.³⁴

Very generally, Churchill's itinerary in America was as follows. He arrived in the United States on 14 January and went directly to Florida.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, telegram, 30 Oct. 1945.

³¹ *Ibid.*, telegram, 31 Oct. 1945.

³² Halifax papers, Churchill College, Cambridge (hereafter cited as 'Halifax papers'), 44.410.4.11, letter, 6 Feb. 1946.

³³ Attlee papers, box 4, Churchill file. Churchill in his letter had asked for 'suitable facilities', for which he offered to pay, and for the 'necessary currency arrangements'. By facilities he probably meant telegrams, the diplomatic bag, plus secretarial and other embassy assistance, including a place to stay in Washington. Yergin seems to assume from the correspondence of Churchill with HMG and of Attlee with Halifax that the Labour government knew and approved beforehand what Churchill would say in America. This, I believe, is reading far too much into what was actually said. See Yergin, *The Shattered Peace*, p. 175.

³⁴ The copy of this reply in the Truman papers, secretary's file, is dated 16 Nov. That in the Attlee papers, box 4, Churchill file, is dated a day later. The latter copy likely bears the date it was decoded and reyped in Number 10 Downing St and delivered to Churchill.

Later he travelled to Washington, staying from 10 to 12 February, to discuss with Truman 'the details of the journey' to Fulton, according to a report from Halifax, and one should bear the ambassador's phraseology in mind.³⁵ (Truman had hoped to be able to get to Miami to see Churchill rather than have Churchill come to him but 'was unavoidably detained in Washington by official business'.)³⁶ Churchill also met with Secretary of State James Byrnes and with presidential adviser Bernard Baruch in Florida a few days after he returned from his Washington trip. Following that trip, he remained in Florida until 3 March when he began his journey to Fulton. After his address there on 5 March, he gave a series of talks and press interviews on the east coast of the United States before returning to Great Britain on 21 March.³⁷

The significance of the meetings with Truman, Byrnes and Baruch is perhaps obvious in view of the remarks of American officials later to the effect that the administration did not know the contents of the speech. In fact, Byrnes told the press on 8 March 1946, 'In Florida the former Prime Minister simply mentioned to me generally that he intended to discuss the general subject, emphasizing the little cottage and the people who lived in the cottages, but that [sic] he did not ask my advice'.³⁸

In the speech the cottages were represented as being threatened by tyranny which needed to be resisted. It one wanted to be critical of Byrnes's position one might maintain that if he knew of the cottages he must have had a reasonable knowledge of the anti-Soviet thrust of the speech at least.

Furthermore, on 7 March Churchill wired Attlee and Bevin saying, among other things, that Truman saw the speech on the train to Fulton and liked it, and that Byrnes and Admiral William Leahy, the president's top military aide, had seen it before that. Byrnes was 'excited by it' and Leahy 'enthusiastic'.³⁹ In *All in one lifetime*, Byrnes confirms that he had seen it, saying he read it in full at the British embassy when Churchill was in Washington on his way to Fulton.

The next morning, when I gave President Truman a résumé of the contents of the speech, he decided not to read the advance copy that was to be sent to him. Anticipating that the Soviets would charge the British and Americans with 'ganging up' on them, he could truthfully say he had not read the speech prior to its delivery.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, to return to an earlier point in the story, Halifax recorded in his diary that Churchill rang him up on 8 February⁴¹ and said that as the President had had to cancel his trip to Florida, he, Winston, would

³⁵ F.O. 371-51633, paper AN 1246, telegram, Halifax to F.O., 13 Apr. 1946.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Byrnes papers, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina (hereafter cited as 'Byrnes papers'), folder 558, no. 14.

³⁸ Williams, *A prime minister remembers*, pp. 162-3.

³⁹ James F. Byrnes, *All in one lifetime* (New York, 1958), p. 349.

very much like to run up here for a day to talk over with the President what he was going to say at Westminster if the President could give him an evening'.⁴¹

The date was made for Churchill to visit the White House on 10 February after dinner. Halifax records that upon his return, Churchill expressed himself as

Very pleased with his talk and the President was quite happy, and more than happy about his making the kind of fraternal association speech that he has in mind to deliver... We talked a good deal about how he should present it from the point of view of Russia, which he thinks he can manage... It will certainly start up a very violent argument here, but will, unless I am much mistaken, strike a responsive chord right through the country which will be stronger than the dissent.⁴²

But remember that in his report of Churchill's visit to America, Halifax described this trip to Washington as one simply to discuss with Truman 'the details of the journey' to Fulton. Why he put it that way is unclear. It seems as though for some reason he felt the need to uphold the story of American officials, who by then had denied previous knowledge of the speech, and to do so even before his own government and in secret diplomatic correspondence.

On 11 February Halifax again recorded that Churchill talked to him 'a great deal' about the speech and his plan to highlight 'the importance of maintaining very close Anglo-American cooperation'. Churchill thought he could say this, Halifax states, 'without upsetting Uncle Joe, who will however read, and it is hoped read to his profit, between the lines'.⁴³ It seems clear from this and other diary entries that Halifax at least at this point in the development of the speech, did not realize how hard Churchill would come down on the Soviets.⁴⁴ Indeed, when the speech was made there was no need for Stalin to read between the lines.

Further evidence that Truman, however, did know what Churchill would say comes from Churchill himself. On 16 February 1946 M. R. Wright of the British embassy in Washington sent P. J. Dixon, at that time Bevin's principal private secretary, a 'provisional programme' for Churchill's visit in America from 26 February until 19 March. According to Wright 'The programme was made out by Mr Churchill himself in consultation with the Ambassador during Mr Churchill's flying visit to Washington on the weekend of the 10th-11th February'.⁴⁵ In the programme Churchill, speaking of Truman, said 'He welcomed the outline I gave him of my message'.⁴⁶ Consequently, when Truman made his rather

facetious remark to Byrnes about not wanting actually to read the speech so that the Russians could not accuse him of 'ganging up', it is conceivable that he had another reason for not reading it - he was being over-exposed to it. What would be truly surprising is if someone in Truman's position had read the speech rather than relying on a discussion with and an outline from the author plus a summary from a key subordinate.

It is the British government in London, as distinct from its embassy in Washington, which seems to have known little of the contents of the talk. The following September in speaking to Byrnes of Churchill's remarks in the United States and of a more recent pronouncement by Anthony Eden, Bevin said, 'I had no idea as to what was in their minds. As far as Churchill was concerned we were never consulted on any of these pronouncements and indeed we did not want to be'.⁴⁷ Clearly, the fact that Bevin told this to Byrnes does not make it true. He could have been simply repeating the official British position, which this was. Nonetheless, there is good reason to think that London officials were not consulted and had not known of, nor approved of, the speech beyond giving their blessing to the trip and the speaking engagement on the apparent assumption that Churchill would say 'the right sort of thing'. At one point during his trip Churchill wired London asking for material to use in America but giving no hint, at least that there is any record of, regarding the contents of his speech at Fulton. Hugh Dalton, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, provided the desired data, saying in his diary only that Churchill sent a telegram and adding: 'I am to send W.C. Fulton'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, although Churchill made an outline of his speech for Truman, no copy nor account of it seems to have been sent to London. Nevertheless it is clear that Halifax was very much in the picture. In fact, he states that during Churchill's February visit 'He rehearsed to me a great deal of the speech that he has in mind to deliver, with tears almost rolling down his cheeks...'⁴⁹

When Churchill came to the embassy on 3 March shortly before going to Fulton, there was more consultation about the speech. Halifax states that Lester B. Pearson, then Canadian ambassador to Washington, came to the embassy at Churchill's request and made comments with which Halifax agreed.⁵⁰ Halifax himself made a few suggestions, principally that Churchill moderate his approach towards the Soviet Union, to which,

⁴¹ Attlee papers, box 6, file E. Bevin record of conversation, 29 Sept. 1946.

⁴² *Ibid.*, box 4, Churchill file and Dalton's diary, London School of Economics and Political Science, 29 Feb. 1946.

⁴³ Halifax's diary, 12 Feb. 1946 and also Lord Birkenhead, *Halifax* (London, 1963), p. 559.

⁴⁴ In his memoirs Pearson says Churchill rang up Canadian Prime Minister W. L. Mackenzie King and asked him if he could come to Washington to comment on the speech or if Churchill might send him the text, but that King referred him to Bevin.

⁴⁵ Halifax's diary, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, University of York (hereafter cited as 'Halifax's diary'), 8 Feb. 1946.

⁴⁶ Halifax's diary, 10 Feb. 1946.

⁴⁷ Entry for 8 Feb. 1945, for example.

⁴⁸ Attlee papers, box 4, Churchill file. Churchill returned to Florida 12 Feb., not 11 Feb. as Wright's words might imply. Furthermore, it was not really a weekend, but a period

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1946.

much to the ambassador's surprise, Churchill seemed quite receptive.⁵¹ Halifax was deceived, of course. Earlier during the visit, when asked for help with another speech, he complained: 'I have tried giving Winston notes before and he never uses any of them...'⁵² That there had been little change in the pattern seems to be indicated by his diary entry the day following the talk. Although Churchill phoned him 'fairly content with the reception of his speech', Halifax said it had been 'pretty mixed', and added:

One wonders whether he could have put his idea across without arousing the various oppositions that he has in fact excited. I have said the same sort of thing, with the exception of the outright condemnation of the Soviet, many times; with general approval. And I think, therefore, that it is the impression that his condemnation of the Soviet has given, in the sense that he accepts the division of the world into two blocks and all that lies at the end of that, that is responsible for the trouble.⁵³

This division of opinion between the two men grew somewhat broader in the next few days. Churchill was planning another strong address on 16 March in New York City, following a fiery answer by Stalin to the Fulton speech. Halifax counselled a patient conciliatory reply, even suggesting that Churchill state that he would visit Stalin for 'full and frank' discussions. Churchill rejected these proposals in what must have been a bitterly wounding way, especially considering the background of these two and their previous relationship. He rang up and talked to Lady Halifax, stating that what her husband recommended would be 'the whipped cur coming to heel' and similar to 'going to see Hitler just before the war'.⁵⁴

Returning to the period before the speech, it is interesting to speculate why at that time Halifax never reported its contents in even the most general way to London. Surely one of the main functions of an ambassador is to forewarn his government of developments in the country to which he is assigned which will likely have important ramifications for his own country. No one should have understood this better than someone who had been a foreign minister himself, on the receiving end so to speak.

There is the possibility that Halifax simply misjudged the impact of the speech and saw no reason to trouble officials in Whitehall about it. But his comments in regard to it, as mentioned above, indicate quite differently. He foresaw it would begin 'a very violent argument' in the United States and was worried about its effect in the Soviet Union.

Possibly Halifax found himself in a situation which divided his loyalties. He was a peer, a Tory, for years a member of Conservative governments, and a principal actor in Conservative party politics.

⁵¹ Halifax's diary, 3 Mar. 1946.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17 Feb. 1946.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6 Mar. 1946.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1946 and also Birkenhead, *Halifax*, p. 560.

Nevertheless, he was at the time representing a Labour government in its most important diplomatic assignment. The Labour government was slow to make changes in Britain's diplomatic representation after it assumed office, and some six months after the party had won the election Bevin said he was aware that some supporters of the Government were anxious that more drastic changes be made in the staffing of the Foreign Office and of diplomatic posts abroad. While it was impossible to make the sweeping changes which some critics desired, he said that he was strengthening the staff as opportunities arose.⁵⁵

As Bevin was saying these words, Churchill was spending his three days in Washington. Halifax would remain at his post nearly three months longer until being replaced by Archibald Clark Kerr, transferred from the Moscow embassy.⁵⁶ Whether or not there is benefit in changing career diplomats when governments change is probably debatable, but Halifax, in spite of his foreign office and ambassadorial experience, could only be described as a political appointee, however able. Were his loyalties to the leader of his party or to the head of his government should there be a conflict of interest, as in this case there may well have been? And if he felt that Attlee and Bevin might be disturbed by what Churchill was going to say, by the concepts Churchill had come to feel were so important, could he bring himself to inform them of Churchill's plans, to 'peach' on him, so to speak? Could he bring himself to warn London that this speech would be a world-shaker, and subject of 'a very violent argument'? Might London not ask the right to edit? Might it not ask Churchill to say something that would be less controversial in America and in the Soviet Union, less contradictory to its policy of support to the United Nations? In short, might it not in one way or another express disapproval as a result of Halifax's information? Did Halifax prefer not to risk this?

I quite admit that all this is speculation, although I think there is very good reason to so speculate, considering the personal-professional pinch he may well have been in. It is, incidentally, interesting to note that although Halifax was occasionally mildly critical of Churchill in his diary, he was never anything but laudatory when reporting to Whitehall on Churchill's visit.

It is also interesting, inasmuch as Halifax said nothing about the speech to London, to wonder why Whitehall did not ask him for an opinion sometime during the month of February 1946 particularly inasmuch as the notion was abroad that Churchill was going to say something along the lines of what, in fact, he did say. On 15 February, for example, a

⁵⁵ *Cab.* 198, vol. 7, C.M. (46) 14th conclusions, minute 1, confidential annex, 11 Feb. 1946.

⁵⁶ Halifax had been scheduled for nearly a year to retire in the spring of 1946. See his letter to Churchill of 30 Apr. 1945, and Churchill's telegraphed reply of 18 June 1945. See also Halifax's letter to Churchill of 3 Dec. 1945, which shows that Bevin agreed generally with this schedule, fixing Halifax's departure from Washington for 1 May 1946. Halifax papers, A4.410.4.11.

reporter said to Byrnes, 'There also has been considerable published speculation that Mr Churchill... [on] March 5, will advocate a strong Anglo-American military alliance and development of a western bloc to balance the Russian power...'³⁷ (The embassy, incidentally, scarcely mentioned press speculation in its reports, although it once stated simply that during Churchill's February visit to Washington there was 'excited friendly but not especially significant comment'.)³⁸

In any event, it could well be that Attlee and Bevin, in popular phraseology, really did not want to know. They were faced with Churchill's international prestige and also with the fact that he had already sent the outline of his remarks to the president of the United States who had made no sign of disapproving. Consequently, they would need not only to ask Churchill to change his remarks if they disagreed with what he intended to say but somehow tactfully to inform Truman of the changes, or ask Churchill to do so. Although all of this, of course, could have been done, it would have been awkward for Britain however it were handled, and stories would likely get into the American and possibly British press that His Majesty's government was muzzling the great war hero, etc. It was indeed something of a 'no-win' position for HMG. However, if there was discussion at any time along these lines, if there was concern beforehand about the effects of the speech, or any weighing of pros and cons, there seems to be no evidence of it in the public records today.³⁹ This, of course, does not mean that there may not have been a good deal of consideration of the matter that was never committed to paper. On the other hand, the government may well have been too concerned with pressing matters of the day to expend many energies on this situation in spite of the fact that the American press was already speculating about it. For even if it did not feel it could censor Churchill, it surely could have discreetly put out the word, as indeed it did afterwards, that he would speak as a private citizen and that the views expressed would not necessarily be endorsed by His Majesty's government. What it could not, of course, disarm was the fact that Churchill's views seemed clearly to be endorsed by the government of its principal ally.

In this regard, some significant facts came to light during a cabinet meeting on 11 March. Minute 6 states:

The facts were that the British Information Services in the United States had been asked by the White House to help to provide liaison with the Press over the speech and had felt that they could not refuse this request. British

³⁷ Byrnes papers, folder 557, 'Memorandum of the Press and Radio News Conference, February 15, 1946'.

³⁸ F.O. 371-35606, paper AN 458, supplement to weekly political summary, 18 Feb. 1946.

³⁹ Unfortunately in this regard, all Bevin's private papers for the years he was foreign secretary regardless of their dates remain closed until 1989, thirty-one years from his death.

Information Services had cabled the text of the speech to the Ministry of Information in advance and it became known to Press correspondents here that this had been done. In response to requests from the Press, advance copies of the speech had been issued here for their use. Advance copies had not, in fact, been seen by Ministers....

The Foreign Secretary said that in replying to requests for comments on the speech he proposed to take the line that the speech was made by Mr Churchill's own responsibility and that the policy of the Government towards Russia was defined in the speech which he (the Foreign Secretary) had made in the House of Commons on the 21st February.

Some discussion followed on the question whether it was right that a Government Department should assist in giving publicity to speeches made by members of the Opposition, or by other persons when the contents of those speeches were not known to the Government. Mr Churchill was, no doubt, in a special position, but events had shown that even in his case there might be embarrassing consequences....⁴⁰

This document tells a number of things about the episode. First of all it suggests that Truman not only knew what was in the speech but wanted it to have widest dissemination, and therefore the White House, not the British embassy, asked the British Information Services (BIS) to help provide liaison with the press, and indeed this is the organization that duplicated and distributed the speech. It could well be that Truman wanted Churchill's words to have maximum audience and impact because he wanted them to help him change his nation's policy. One can only wonder, however, why he did not use the press relations mechanism of his own White House, surely second to none in ability to attract the attention of the American and, in fact, international communications media. Furthermore, inasmuch as he would figure prominently in the programme, it would be as logical and seemly for it to disseminate the speech as for the British Information Services to do so. If its conceivable, though not certain, that he wanted to downplay his own role in the development and presentation of the ideas being expressed, making it seem less like a cabal, particularly to the Soviets. Furthermore, the ideas might well have had more impact on Americans if they seemed to be purely Churchill's, with no input from Truman, who may have felt and probably correctly, that in international affairs he carried less weight with his countrymen than did Churchill.⁴¹ In addition, the speech seems certainly to have been a 'trial balloon' for Truman, who would dissociate

⁴⁰ Cab. 128, vol. 5, C.M. (46) 3rd conclusions, minute 6, 11 Mar. 1946.

⁴¹ British officials, at any rate, felt that Churchill's popularity and influence in America were enormous. H.M. Embassy Washington reported shortly after his defeat that Churchill had 'a very large American following' and said 'the extent to which Mr Churchill had gripped the American imagination is reflected in the nation-wide cartoons and editorial tributes to what one paper called "This great Gladiator, who bestrode the Continent like a Colossus"'. F.O. 371-44537, paper AN 2966, weekly political summary, 4 Aug. 1945.

himself from the ideas expressed if they aroused undue hostility in whatever quarter.⁶² The British government, of course, would not be in quite as good a position, which is probably why much of its concern centred around BIS and its parent ministry of information. Their role in distributing the speech on government stationery did much to give it the appearance of official approval.

For anyone concerned with the dynamics of bureaucracies it might be interesting to note that BIS cabled the text in advance to the ministry of information in London which in turn distributed it to the press. Nevertheless, unless indeed there was a certain amount of dissembling in the cabinet meeting that considered the issue on 11 March, no minister of state saw the speech until it was made and carried throughout the world by the news media. Whatever else, the British government seems to have been extremely sleepy in the matter.

The cabinet, at least judging from the record of the 11 March meeting, admittedly a crude gauge, was somewhat disconcerted though hardly distraught by the turn of events. It considered sending special instructions to the ministry of information, but a week later determined that this would be 'inappropriate' and that 'the point could best be dealt with on individual cases as they arose'.⁶³ Part of this decision probably stemmed from a feeling that the case may have been close to unique, and with the horses cavorting in the roadway, it was a bit late to close up the barn. Nonetheless, instructions went out to the embassy and BIS in the United States, at least, to check with London before helping with non-government speeches.⁶⁴ In addition European posts were told 'not to distribute speeches by members of the opposition to private individuals, unless special requests are made by such individuals'.⁶⁵

III

The reaction in London to the Fulton talk was varied. Although there seems to have been some flurry in Whitehall as there clearly was in Westminster several things emerge from the records of British officials in the days immediately following the speech. These are that the foreign office gave Churchill almost total approval, that Whitehall seems not to

⁶² *Time* magazine called it 'a magnificent trial balloon', a description with which J. L. Gaddis, to whom I am indebted for the quotation, concurs. See *The United States and the origins of the cold war, 1941-1947* (New York: London, 1972), p. 307. Gaddis, however, feels Churchill confused the issue by coupling the Soviet question with that of an Anglo-American alliance (p. 309). This may well be, but the Anglo-American question was at least as important to Churchill as the other.

⁶³ Cab. 128, vol. 5, C.M. (46) 23rd conclusions, minute 6, 11 Mar. 1946, and 25th conclusions, minute 1, 18 Mar. 1946.

⁶⁴ F.O. 371-51624, paper AN 748, minute, Mason to Bevin, 12 Mar. 1946. Bevin noted on this minute, 'The whole show needs a change', referring probably to the government's information services, which, in fact, were in the process of being restructured.

⁶⁵ F.O. 371-56356, paper N 6449, draft answer to a parliamentary question, 6 May 1946.

have known the content of the speech beforehand, as has already been indicated, and that the British government was somewhat embarrassed but kept itself in very tight rein and its comments, both public and private, very restricted.⁶⁶

It was soon asked in Whitehall whether or not the embassy in Washington had known the contents of the speech prior to its delivery. Consequently, on 8 March, Harold B. Butler, minister in Washington in charge of information, told the ministry of information:

I understand that the Ambassador had an opportunity of seeing Mr Churchill's speech in draft, though not in its final form. As Mr Churchill made it perfectly plain that he was speaking only for himself, Lord Halifax did not feel called upon to express either approval or disapproval, any more than he would in the case of any other eminent private citizen visiting the United States.⁶⁷

In spite of this telegram, Attlee told parliament on 11 March, 'Of course, His Majesty's Government had no previous knowledge of the contents of the speech. His Majesty's Ambassador was not called upon to approve or disapprove the speech beforehand.'⁶⁸ Tom Driberg (Labour) to whom Attlee was responding, pursued the matter, asking if the ambassador had read the speech beforehand 'as was widely stated in America at the time'. Attlee replied 'I am not aware of that. It may have been handed to him.'⁶⁹ Perhaps Attlee had not seen or known of the Butler telegram, although his words seem to echo it.

D. L. Lipson (Independent) asked the question that must have been on many people's minds. Did Attlee mean that 'it is not the practice of His Majesty's Ambassador in Washington to inform His Majesty's Government of the contents of any speech that has been issued to him beforehand?'; and Attlee replied, 'I should have thought so. I do not expect he is in the habit of sending long excerpts from speeches.' Pressed further on the matter by W. H. Warbey (Labour), who wanted Attlee to make it clear that the government 'entirely disapprove[d] of the tone and temper of the speech'. Attlee replied simply that 'His Majesty's Government are not called upon to express any opinion of a speech delivered in another country by a private individual. The policy of His Majesty's Government has been laid down perfectly plainly in the House by the Foreign Secretary.'⁷⁰ Driberg rejoined that 'the Leader of

⁶⁶ Francis Williams, whose accounts of these events have figured rather importantly, states in *A prime minister remembers* (London, 1961), p. 162, 'The immediate reaction of the Foreign Office was one of consternation.' In *Nothing so strange* (London, 1970), p. 244, he says of the foreign office 'It was thrown into a great tizzy by Churchill's Fulton speech, on which neither Attlee nor Bevin nor our Embassy in Washington had, of course, been consulted.' If the foreign office was really in a tizzy, it was certainly under control by the time it committed anything to paper. Everything I have seen indicates solid approval of Churchill's talk from the start by nearly everyone except Hector McNeil. Williams is, of course, simply in error regarding the embassy in Washington not being consulted.

⁶⁷ F.O. 371-51624, paper AN 748, telegram.

⁶⁸ *Hansard*, vol. 420, col. 760.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 761.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

His Majesty's Opposition surely has something more than the status of an ordinary private citizen? Will my right hon. Friend not explicitly repudiate the dangerous doctrine contained in the speech? Apparently Attlee did not reply because the record moves at this point to another subject.⁷¹

If this parliamentary questioning was irritating to Attlee, he showed no sign of it in communications with Churchill. The latter on 7 March reported to Attlee and Bevin on his talk and its reception, telling especially how it favourably impressed US administration figures, as well as relating other aspects of the American political scene.⁷² Attlee replied on 13 March, two days after his discussion in parliament of the Fulton talk, and said:

I have just heard... of the very helpful remarks which you made at the National Press Club luncheon about the American loan, and I should like to send you my warm thanks and appreciation for the friendly line you took.

Thank you also for the long and interesting telegram which you sent Bevin and me on March 7 - I hope we may have a talk on your return. I have shown the telegram to Eden.

I trust that the remainder of your stay will be pleasant and that you are keeping well. Best wishes to Mrs Churchill and yourself.⁷³

If Attlee was very upset with Churchill for having said what he did at Fulton he was hiding it superbly.

Meanwhile, however, there were some rumblings about the distribution of the speech in other countries. In one case the assertion reached Whitehall that copies were being distributed in cafés by the British embassy in Warsaw. The embassy refuted this with the somewhat uncontrite statement that it had not been 'especially zealous' in distributing the talk, and furthermore if there were more freedom of information and opinion in Poland there would not be such a 'fuss' about the distribution. In addition, Ambassador V. F. W. Cavendish-Bentinck made clear his approval of the speech as was characteristic of the foreign office.⁷⁴

'Zealous' or not, the embassy in Poland had transcribed the speech, or at least excerpts of it, from a BBC broadcast and had circulated it with an embassy-produced daily bulletin 'to all important newspapers and to various libraries and official institutions', to a few individuals 'prominent or otherwise', and to people who came to the press section of the embassy and asked for copies.⁷⁵ Quite possibly variations of this pattern occurred at embassies around the world.

Meanwhile, Paul Mason, head of the North American department of the foreign office, wrote a long analysis of Churchill's talk the very tone

of which indicated complete approval as well as an unawareness of the contents before it was given. For it seems unlikely that a man in his position would engage in a detailed study if he knew the contents beforehand and especially if he thought the persons reading his remarks knew them also or even had a part in shaping them. It surely seems clear not only that the North American department did not know the substance of the talk before it was given, but that its chief assumed that the top people in the foreign office were equally ignorant.

IV

Both the political background and the public reaction in America to the address were reported extensively to London. For example, the weekly political summary dated 10 March 1946 sent from the British embassy in Washington to the foreign office⁷⁶ stated:

The troubled debate about the Soviet Union's intentions and United States foreign policy continues. The Soviet's disregard of Allied agreements about Persia and alarming first-hand accounts from American journalists of conditions in Manchuria have heightened the feeling of concern. Mr Churchill's dramatically blunt review of the world situation in his speech at Fulton, Missouri, has made a very profound impact on the country and is being widely and heatedly discussed.

The summary added that rumours of a Russian-Turkish military crisis, news that the American battleship *Missouri* was being sent to the Mediterranean Sea and that the Royal Navy was planning fleet manoeuvres off Gibraltar had all added to the tension, and then stated: Reactions to this situation vary. Tough-minded Conservatives in the War and Navy Departments talk about the inevitability of a showdown with the Soviet Union and hint that it may be better now than later. Internationalists clutch at United Nations Organization with a new devotion born of desperation, while others turn, half fearfully and half hopefully, to another conference of the three Great Powers as a final attempt to hammer out a new basis of co-operation.

Later it stated:

It is generally assumed that both President Truman and His Majesty's Government were privy to Mr Churchill's speech in Missouri, and that fact, in addition to Mr Churchill's own exceptional appeal to Americans, has resulted in the keenest attention being paid to the speech throughout the country. Although the bulk of the press and of Congress are clearly unwilling to endorse it as an adequate solution to present troubles, it has given the sharpest jolt to American thinking of any utterance since the end of the war.

The summary added that 'Crusading Liberals and Left-Wingers' denounced it as 'unjustifiably hostile' to the Soviet Union and a 'scheme for making the United States underwrite the evils of British Imperial

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Williams, *A prime minister remembers*, pp. 163-4.

⁷³ F.O. 371-56355, paper N 6286, telegram, Cavendish-Bentinck to F.O., 13 May 1946.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

⁷⁶ F.O. 371-51606, paper AN 656.

power' while 'middle-of-the-road Liberals' and moderates feared injury to the United Nations Organization. Conservatives agreed with Churchill's analysis, the embassy said, but were 'reluctant to accept the cure offered.'

Commenting on the report, J. C. Donnelly of the North American department said that since the end of the war Americans had 'devoted themselves to an orgy of escapism' but the talk, he believed, would make them 'more realistic in their attitude toward the future of the world community and more aware of the fact that their fundamental desires for that world community are the same as ours and need our support'.⁷⁷

B. E. F. Gage also of the North American department said, 'Mr Churchill's torch of the closest Anglo-American co-operation must now be carried by Americans for he is probably the only Englishman alive who could wave it in America with relative impunity.'⁷⁸ The file was signed without comment by N. Butler, superintending undersecretary for the North American department, and O. G. Sargent, newly appointed as permanent undersecretary of the foreign office.

It is striking that in all of this minuting there is not the slightest irritation evident on the part of the embassy or the foreign office either at what Churchill said, thus taking a line different from the government's foreign policy at that moment, or at the fact that he said it, thus cantering cavalierly across the foreign office's turf. The only critical note came from Paul Mason who was 'not sure' the timing was as effective as it might have been. Otherwise this file contains nothing but approval.

One important dissenter, however, was Parliamentary Undersecretary Hector McNeil. In referring to a report sent 15 April from the ambassador in Washington stating that Churchill focused American attention on the Soviet problem, he said:

With great respect I find it difficult to believe that the U.S.A. was unaware of the Soviet threat before Mr Churchill spoke. I also find his solicitude for H.M.G. contrasting strangely with his intervention on Egypt in the House a week after he had been privately informed of H.M.G.'s intentions.⁷⁹

Both Churchill and the British embassy officials, however, soon became sensitive to the reaction over the call for Anglo-American partnership, feeling apparently that this was the point which most alarmed Americans.⁸⁰ This sensitivity was reflected in subsequent public utterances by Churchill during his US trip when he was at pains to stress that military alliance was not his intention. His intention, in fact, was something beyond a military alliance, but surely some sort of military combination was essential to it. At any event, it was difficult for Americans to understand what he meant if he did not mean at least that.

In fact, it was hard even for British diplomats to get it straight, for back on 8 March the embassy described the Churchillian remedy for the international situation as 'a close military alliance'.⁸¹ Truman seems to have thought of it this way also. When questioned by reporters at a press conference, he refused to comment on Churchill's proposal for what he called 'a British-American alliance'.⁸² (Truman at this same conference 'insisted' that he had not seen the address in advance of delivery, according to the *New York Times* account. Meanwhile, Byrnes at a separate conference told the press he had not 'been consulted' on the speech.)⁸³

Returning the focus to British officialdom, although the embassy spoke of 'a close military alliance' in its cable of 8 March sent to London over Halifax's name, the ambassador took quite a different tone in his own summary of the trip which he sent on 15 April.⁸⁴ Saying that some Americans had 'incorrectly interpreted' Churchill's remarks as 'an open demand for a military alliance' he devoted a good deal of his report to clarifying this point. This and other aspects of his assessment of the speech are worth a glance.

During the period of Mr Churchill's stay in Washington, this embassy received daily a fan mail of over one hundred letters and telegrams commenting on Mr Churchill's utterances, issuing invitations to him and asking for autographs, photographs and advice. It soon became apparent that the main criticisms of Mr Churchill's speech at Fulton arose, not so much from his warning against possible Soviet aggression, as from a misunderstanding of his strong plea for Anglo-American unity, which was incorrectly interpreted as an open demand for a military alliance. . . . The resulting criticism on the score that he had invited the United States to 'gang up' against the Soviet Union in support of British imperialism, came from a wide section of the American public. . . .

Halifax concluded that Churchill impelled 'liberal-minded spokesmen' to avow their faith in the UNO,⁸⁵ an opinion many Americans would and did contest. It seemed to them that he had done quite the opposite, if not calling for confrontation, then for a legitimacy for the confrontation that had already begun. Nonetheless, Churchill during his trip consistently declared his support for the UNO. For example, on 15 March in a short talk given at New York's Metropolitan Club he said: 'we must stand by this great institution and nothing must be done to mar its unity and integrity or weaken its sovereign power'.⁸⁶

In the earlier report, the one sent on 8 March before the word 'alliance' had become taboo, the embassy stated:

Although general comment is critical of some or all aspects of the speech, it cannot, except in the case of the extreme left and Rossophils [sic], avoid

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., various reports in Mar. and Apr. 1946.

⁸⁰ F.O. 371-51633, paper AN 1246, minute, 13 Mar. 1946.

⁸¹ Ibid., telegram, Halifax to F.O., 8 Mar. 1946.

⁸² *New York Times*, 9 Mar. 1946.

⁸³ F.O. 371-51633, paper AN 1246, telegram, Halifax to F.O.

⁸⁴ Ibid., or *New York Times*, 16 Mar. 1946.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

recognizing some truth in the analysis of the situation, however unpalatable ... This proposal [military alliance] is attacked on the traditional grounds of the unpopularity of formal alliance in the United States, refusal to underwrite British imperialism, reluctance to be used to pull British chestnuts from the fire and the 'body blow' such an alliance would administer to UNO, etc.

At the same time it seems quite clear that no other statesman, American or foreign, could have got away with quite so much at relatively so small a cost... Mr Churchill is somewhat in the position of a dentist who has diagnosed a severe inflammation and proposes the use of the drill which may have to be followed by actual extraction of the diseased tooth. All but the left-wing journalists and politicians [sic] concede that there is something wrong with the tooth in question; some are inclined to suspect that the condition may be grave indeed, but almost all shy with real or simulated horror from the idea of the drill and complain that the dentist is notorious for his love of drastic remedies and that surely modern medicine has provided more painless methods of cure, and that so brutal a method as that recommended by Mr Churchill harks back to rough old-fashioned practices. But there is no doubt that the speech, more than those of Byrnes, Vandenberg or Dulles, has made it difficult for the United States public to ignore the painful choices before them.⁶⁷

Note the embassy's suggestion that Churchill was a more persuasive spokesman for a new policy than several prominent Americans. Likely this occurred to Truman also.

Within a fortnight, however, the embassy thought it discerned revisionism in some quarters where before hostility to the speech had reigned. On 16 March it reported to London:

There has been a tendency in various quarters (e.g. Senators Ball and Hatch and the *New York Times*) to revise initial damning estimates of Mr Churchill's Fulton speech in a more favourable direction. This seems to be the result of the Soviet Government's continued aggressive tendencies, of Stalin's accusations, and Mr Churchill's explanations that he had never used the phrase 'Anglo-American alliance'. He also told journalists (off the record) he did not as so many liberals have gloomily predicted expect America to defend British foreign policy in every regard, or vice versa.⁶⁸

Nonetheless not all the critics had come around. This same report added:

Left Wing comment is intensely bitter, and Liberals generally profess alarm ... Mrs Roosevelt has joined those protesting that closer Anglo-American links will endanger United Nations Organization, and Mr Wallace said that he would oppose the loan⁶⁹ if he thought for one moment that it was connected with an Anglo-American alliance. Many liberals, including Mr Ickes and James Roosevelt, have protested against propaganda designed to split what C. Vincent Sheehan in Utah on March 13th called 'the co-regents of the earth', i.e. United States and U.S.S.R.

⁶⁷ F.O. 371-51633, paper AN 1246, telegram, Halifax to F.O., 8 Mar. 1946.

⁶⁸ F.O. 371-51607, paper AN 742, telegram, Halifax to F.O.

⁶⁹ The postwar loan which the British government was requesting from the United States.

The same day, 16 March, on which the embassy sent in this review of reactions to the Fulton speech, Churchill attended a dinner given in his honour by the City of New York. In the presence of Mayor William O'Dwyer and Governor Thomas Dewey of the State of New York, Churchill made a talk that would probably have been as jolting as the Fulton speech had it not come second. He was to an extent reaffirming his position in the face of double-barreled criticism to his Fulton talk in the columns of *Pravda*, i.e. a strident editorial on 11 March and an angry interview given by Stalin two days later, both of which will be discussed below in more detail.

Churchill emphasized the same themes that he stressed at Fulton: (1) a close Anglo-American tie was necessary for world peace, (2) this tie did not conflict with the concept of the United Nations Organization, which he supported, and (3) he admitted the Soviets and wished them well but intended to draw attention to points of conflict and difference. He stated that 'when I spoke at Fulton ten days ago I felt it was necessary for some one in an unofficial position to speak in arresting terms about the present plight of the world'.⁷⁰ His observation that it would have to be someone in an unofficial position is worthy of notice. Surely he was trying to ease the strain at home and abroad on the British government. Attlee already had to answer on this point in parliament on 11 March, as mentioned earlier, and so did McNeil, who the same day assured parliament that Britain was basing its foreign policy on the UNO.⁷¹ But furthermore, had Churchill been prime minister when he made the remarks that he did at Fulton, his office might well have increased an American tendency to suspect HMG of wily manoeuvring to hitch the US to the cart of Britain's imperial policy.

Churchill's almost chauvinistic belief in the Anglo-American tie was heard clearly in this talk.

Let me declare, however, that the progress and freedom of all the peoples of the world, under a reign of law enforced by a world organization, will not come to pass, nor will the age of plenty begin, without the persistent, faithful, and above all the fearless exertions of the British and American systems of society.⁷²

Again, he spoke of the 'English-speaking world' as though there were in fact a kind of union (a concept which caused Stalin in his *Pravda* interview to accuse him of racism).

V

Soviet reaction to the Fulton speech, if not surprising, was at least interesting if only because of its slowness in developing. It was not until

⁷⁰ The text of this talk was cabled by Halifax to Bevin the day it was made. See F.O. 371-51633, paper AN 1246. The text is also in the *New York Times*, 17 Mar. 1946.

⁷¹ *Hansard*, vol. 420, col. 749.

⁷² *New York Times*, 12 Mar. 1946.

8 March that Moscow took public notice of the event, when papers there published a brief report that Churchill had made 'an anti-Soviet speech', an item they printed at the head of a column of unfavourable comments on the talk by United States senators and British Labour party representatives.⁸⁵ On 11 March came the real 'counter-blast', as the British embassy in Moscow called it, for besides a 'fair and full' summary of the talk, *Pravda* carried a bitter editorial entitled 'Churchill rattles the sabre'.⁸⁶ Recalling his anti-Soviet activities after World War I, it said:

Many years have gone by, and a lot of water over the dam, but Churchill remained true to type. He, as one can see, forgot nothing and learned nothing... What does the proposal of Churchill come to? The formation of an Anglo-American military alliance that would secure Anglo-American rule throughout the world, the liquidation of the three-power coalition, also the U.N.O. and make a policy of force the dominant factor in the development of the world. All you need to complete the picture is a frank formulation for a 'cordon sanitaire' against the U.S.S.R.⁸⁷

Churchill was grouped by *Pravda* editors with Senator Vandenberg and other 'American reactionaries', and in return for his depreciation of conditions in eastern Europe, *Pravda* decried conditions in Greece.⁸⁸ Besides various broadcasts in Russian, some at dictation speed for the benefit of provincial newspapers, the editorial was transmitted in a number of other languages (at least four times in English). In addition English and French versions were sent out on the Soviet news agency's 'radio ticker'.⁸⁹

A report from H.M. Embassy Moscow, signed by F. K. Roberts, *chargé d'affaires*, said:

The *Pravda* article has caused a sensation in Moscow. It is being read everywhere with unusual interest and there is considerable disquiet among the general public....

My own impression is that the Soviet authorities were much taken aback by this frank statement by Mr Churchill. They seem genuinely alarmed by many recent signs of American rapprochement with Britain in the face of high-handed Soviet actions and to fear however illogically the establishment of an 'atomic Anglo-Saxon bloc' their [sic] natural reaction is to endeavour to frighten United States Government and His Majesty's Government and public opinion in both countries with the bogey of Soviet withdrawal from international co-operation....

The time-lag between Churchill's speech and this counterblast suggests that there has been careful consideration and that it has been decided that the (G.P. undec. *2advantage*) of playing up capitalist encirclement and attempting to divide us from the Americans outweigh the dangers of revealing to the Soviet public the extent of the opposition which recent Soviet policy has provoked.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* ⁸⁶ F.O. 371-56781, paper N 3315, telegram, Roberts to F.O., 11 Mar. 1946.

⁸⁷ *New York Times*, 12 Mar. 1946.

⁸⁸ *New York Times*, 12 Mar. 1946.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ F.O. 371-56781, paper N 3315, telegram, Roberts to F.O., 11 Mar. 1946. BBC monitor report, 11 Mar. 1946.

The embassy also saw the *Pravda* editorial as an effort to divert foreign public opinion from Persia and Manchuria, to consolidate domestic opinion, and possibly to play on American fears of 'pulling British chestnuts out of the fire'. Furthermore, it speculated that the editorial was 'part of a campaign of intimidation covering British interests from Indonesia to the Bay of Biscay, intended to teach us that we must expect trouble if we fail to acquiesce in Soviet policy or to support "Big Three" collaboration on Soviet terms'.⁹¹

Note that Roberts dismisses even the possibility that the Soviets had any reason to fear Churchill's proposed alliance, if we may use that word. Furthermore, he did not even countenance the notion that the Soviets could have had some reason for concern, for thinking Churchill was engaging in what they might well have viewed as an old and well-known proclivity for red-baiting. This is not to suggest that Churchill's proposals and motives can be reduced to that. It is to suggest that H.M. Embassy Moscow's reporting on Soviet reactions seems to have been a bit insensitive. Even if everything Roberts said about Soviet motives were true, and it might have been, yet the Soviets still must have been worried about the Fulton speech from a security standpoint.

In a minute relating to this telegram, Thomas Brimelow, one of the officials handling Soviet affairs in the northern department of the foreign office, commented in a manner similar to Roberts's. Writing after Soviet radio and *Izvestia* had also commented on the talk, he saw the Russian statements as an effort to slander Churchill and the British. 'So long as the Soviet Government is consolidating its position outside its own frontiers, it needs a country of "reactionary" tendencies, but without dangerously warlike leanings, to consolidate against, and the British Empire fills the bill....'⁹²

Like Roberts, Brimelow gives no indication of crediting Soviet manifestations of fear. Furthermore, foreign office officials, as they discussed the Soviet reaction to Fulton, showed no trace of any misgivings regarding the appropriateness or advisability of Churchill's speech or any feelings that it may have worsened rather than improved the international situation. The Kremlin's reaction in their view was principally an effort to discomfit Great Britain.

The second major salvo from Moscow, the interview Stalin gave to *Pravda*, drew similar treatment from the British embassy. It was published on 14 March and again Soviet radio carried it to the world in multiple broadcasts. Stalin called Churchill's speech 'a dangerous act' and 'a set-up for war against the Soviet Union' and denounced what he said was a 'racial theory' propounded in the speech, i.e. the supremacy of English-speaking nations.⁹³ Roberts reported:

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *New York Times*, 14 Mar. 1946, text of the interview based on the Moscow broadcast.

Most of it and in particular the comparison between Churchill and Hitler and the references to warmongers and to racial theories, is so far-fetched and puerile that it can hardly earn a respectful hearing, still less credence, from any but the most convinced fellow-travellers. Stalin therefore seems to have been addressing himself very much to the Soviet public, who have to be prepared for trials of strength ahead.¹⁰²

Brimelow minuted on this report that the Soviets had never forgiven the British for their part in the wars of intervention following the Bolshevik revolution and furthermore that they believed Britain could not forgive them for their pact with Germany in 1939. They consequently believed Soviet-British relations in the postwar period would be no better than in the pre-war period. R. M. A. Hankey, head of the northern department which handled Soviet affairs, agreed.¹⁰³

Roberts also reported Stalin as saying there was no point in prolonging the Anglo-Soviet treaty, as Bevin had suggested, if one of the signatories infringed it, thus hinting, in Roberts's opinion, that if the British government took the same line as Churchill had, the Soviets might denounce the treaty. Roberts also pointed out that the Soviets still had not published Aitlee's remarks in parliament dissociating his government from responsibility for the Fulton speech.¹⁰⁴

Stalin returned to the charge when Sir Maurice Peterson, new British ambassador in Moscow, spoke with him in May 1946. The Soviet leader said the Fulton speech was mainly responsible for the spate of attacks upon Great Britain in the Russian press, adding that he knew 'that Mr Churchill was not a member of the British Government, but he held an important position in England and his speech had not been repudiated'. In reply Peterson insisted that Churchill indeed neither spoke as a member of the British government nor with its encouragement.¹⁰⁵

VI

Churchill's speech at Fulton is perhaps a good example of an idea whose time has come, at least in regard to one of its propositions, i.e. confronting the Soviet Union. In regard to the new degree of combination, or fraternal association, with the United States, it was less successful. It is, of course, risky to state or imply that Churchill's speech by itself shaped international events, but surely it helped to shape them. The British embassy in Washington can be believed that the terms of discussion of international affairs had been altered, and there is also good reason to suspect that this is precisely what President Truman wanted, just as did Churchill.

¹⁰² F.O. 371-56781, paper N 3442, telegram, Roberts to F.O., 14 Mar. 1946.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, minute, 16 Mar. 1946.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, telegram, Roberts to F.O., 14 Mar. 1946.

¹⁰⁵ PREM 8 (349), telegram, Peterson to F.O., 28 May 1946.