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# The Origin of the Formula

## “UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER” IN WORLD WAR II

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The most controversial political decision taken during the Second World War was Roosevelt's announcement at Casablanca on January 24, 1943 that

Peace can come to the world only by the total elimination of German, Japanese and Italian war power. . . [which] means the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy and Japan.

Of course, some people might deny that the announcement deserves to be described as a decision, for in any well-organised system of government, an issue which was likely to affect the lives and well-being of so many persons might be expected to form the subject of long and careful debate, in the course of which the advantages and disadvantages would be clearly set out and weighed, along with those of all other available options. The need for such a procedure would seem to be increased by the fact that not one government but two were involved. Instead of such

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The cycle of writing and rewriting history, and especially politico-military history, is unending. Since the end of World War II, there have been various accounts of the "unconditional surrender" doctrine and assessments of its negative impact. Michael Balfour, who is a student of modern European history and a close observer of German affairs, has begun the process of reassessing these negative conclusions. He presents his version of the emergence of this formula. His analysis is designed to highlight what he sees as the specific political advantages which resulted from "unconditional*

a procedure being adopted, however, Roosevelt afterwards maintained that his statement was quite unpremeditated. The attempt to reconcile the two French generals, Giraud and de Gaulle, had made him think of Grant and Lee—the thought “popped into his mind” that they had called Grant “old Unconditional Surrender”—and the next thing he knew was that he had come out with it at the Press Conference.<sup>1</sup> Churchill later said that, although taken by surprise, he thought it right to endorse what had been said and immediately stood by Roosevelt.<sup>2</sup>

However, now-accessible archives show that the adjective “disingenuous,” which has been applied to Roosevelt’s tale, is a restrained way of describing it.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. machinery of government had in fact been a good deal more methodical than its chief wished to be supposed. Soon after Pearl Harbor the State Department set up an Advisory Committee on Post-war problems; the committee comprised public officials, members of Congress, and distinguished private citizens. In turn, this committee spawned the Sub-Committee on Security Problems, chaired by Mr. Norman Davis, former Ambassador-at-large. On May 21, 1942 this body decided to recommend that

On the assumption that the victory of the U.S. will be conclusive, unconditional surrender rather than an armistice should be sought from the principal enemy states, except perhaps Italy.<sup>4</sup>

At some date thereafter Mr. Davis would seem to have conveyed this decision to the President, apparently without informing his old friend Secretary Hull, the latter recording his *Memoirs* that the State Department had not embraced the idea of unconditional surrender in its post-war planning and that he had been as much surprised as Churchill when President Roosevelt announced it.<sup>5</sup> When the British Minister of Production, Oliver Lyttelton, visited Washington in the following August, he was commissioned by the President to tell Churchill that he [FDR] was going to be satisfied with nothing but the complete surrender of Germany. Thereafter the Allied armies would march into

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*surrender,” including the increased ability of the Allied powers to reconstruct Germany along democratic lines. His conclusions support those of Hans Speier, in his not-widely-known volume, Social Order and the Risks of War (1952). Balfour’s findings converge as well with those presented in Social Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II” (1948) by Shils and Janowitz, which points out that “unconditional surrender” did not strengthen military resistance either at the level of the “main line of resistance” or at the level of the higher command. But clearly the debate on “unconditional surrender” will continue.*

Germany to destroy weapons heavier than machine-guns; an international inspecting force of Russians, Americans, and British would try to prevent Germany from rearming;<sup>6</sup> infraction would be punished by "quarantine" and, if necessary and after warning, by bombing.

The matter was also discussed in the fall of 1942 by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff who, at the end of December, recommended to the President that no armistice be granted Germany, Japan, Italy, and the satellites until they offered the "unconditional surrender" of their armed forces. The President in reply informed them on January 7, 1943 that he intended to support the "unconditional surrender concept" at the forthcoming Conference at Casablanca.<sup>7</sup> He did not, however, so inform the State Department or Mr. Hull, whom he refused to take with him, presumably out of his well-known dislike for conventional methods of diplomacy. In consequence Churchill was unable to bring Eden, his Foreign Secretary, so that the question was discussed in the absence of the second-line personages primarily responsible.<sup>8</sup>

For discussed it certainly was: the President and Prime Minister met on January 14th. On the 20th, Churchill cabled home to ask the Cabinet for its views on the suggestion that the communiqué to be issued to the press at the end of the conference should include

a declaration of the firm intention of the United States and the British Empire to continue the war ruthlessly until we have brought about the "unconditional surrender" of Germany and Japan. The omission of Italy would be to encourage a break-up there. The President liked this idea and it would stimulate our friends in every country.<sup>9</sup>

The Cabinet replied that they were unanimously against excluding Italy, partly because of the effect which exclusion might have in Turkey, the Balkans and elsewhere, partly because "knowledge of the rough stuff coming to them is surely more likely [than exclusion] to have the desired effect on Italian morale."<sup>10</sup> Churchill accepted the Cabinet's view about Italy, though himself remaining opposed to its inclusion.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier in the war the question for Britain had been not what to do after victory, but how to escape defeat. However, in the course of 1942, various statements directed at collating a set of war aims had been made by Eden and other ministers: there was to be no negotiation with Hitler or Nazi regime on any subject; the aggressor nations were to be completely disarmed and kept thusly; Germans responsible for atrocities were to be punished; peace would need not only to be imposed but also thereafter maintained. But provided that Germany behaved in

a law-abiding manner, she would be treated economically like every other nation. Churchill had, however, on more than one occasion, emphasized that it was not only Nazism which had to be eradicated, but also German militarism; in November 1941 Ernest Bevin, the trade-unionist who was Minister of Labour, had written in a newspaper article that

even if they get rid of Hitler, Goering and others, that would not end the German problem. It is Prussian militarism, with all its terrible philosophy, that has to be got rid of from Europe for all time.<sup>12</sup>

The implication always was that these demands would be enforced no matter whether the Germans agreed to them or not. Unless, therefore, after Hitler's removal a German government could be formed which was prepared to accept these articles, a demand for unconditional surrender may be said to have been implicit in them. Roosevelt's announcement did not therefore represent for either Britain or the U.S. as big a departure from previous thinking as has been supposed.

When the draft of the *Casablanca* communiqué was submitted to Roosevelt and Churchill, it contained no reference to unconditional surrender and neither leader seems to have queried the omission. The obvious reason was that Roosevelt instead mentioned it in his talk to the press. After Churchill's telegram to the Cabinet came to light, thus making it impossible to attribute his claimed surprise to the contention that the subject had not been discussed beforehand with him, the inference seems to be that the surprise lay in this manner of publication. But the talk to the press was itself based upon a written text and one of the surviving drafts for this contains emendations which are said to be in Churchill's own hand, and must have been made during the preceding forty-eight hours.<sup>13</sup> Either he did not read the draft carefully, or his memory slipped, or else he, like Roosevelt, wanted to cover his tracks. It is unlikely that we will ever know the exact truth.

The announcement of the policy has been widely regarded as a major blunder. Within two years, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, was to describe it in his diary as "silly and baneful"<sup>14</sup> But critics have not always made clear where they consider the blunder to have lain. The superficial implication is that the Allies should have offered the Germans explicit conditions on which surrender would be accepted. Churchill's answer was that precise terms would have been less rather than more likely to bring surrender about.<sup>15</sup>

Some critics at any rate would reply that, if this were so, then the precise terms were too harsh. In other words they object not merely to the formula, but also to the character of the peace which lay behind the formula. In discussion therefore the question "Should precise terms have been offered?" must be distinguished from the question "Should a hard peace have been insisted on?" The following paragraphs will argue that there would have been no advantage in changing the formula without mitigating the character and that, given the circumstances and personalities involved, an adequate change in the character was not an available option.

### THE ADVANTAGES OF THE FORMULA

Ever since the outbreak of war in 1939, and indeed before it, there had been a division of opinion in Britain and the United States as to whether the Government's policy towards Germany should be "hard" or "soft." The character of the Treaty of Versailles may even be said to have been determined by the tension between these points of view, personified on the one hand by the French Premier Clemenceau and on the other by Woodrow Wilson. Many non-Germans considered the Treaty's terms too severe and attributed the European unrest between 1919 and 1939 to such injudicious and even unjust severity. They had joined the Germans in pressing for revision and as a result the Treaty's application was progressively relaxed. But others considered that what was at fault was the failure to enforce the terms, largely because of the U.S. retreat into isolation and the effectiveness of the German campaign to "organize sympathy."

The rise of National Socialism from 1930 onwards evoked a similar division of view. Some argued that the best way of inducing the German people to reject Hitler was to remedy their grievances; others, condemning this as "appeasement," argued that he would lose his support once it was made clear that the logical consequence of his policies was another war. Paradoxically many (but by no means all) of those in Britain and America who had advocated a "soft" policy after Versailles came to advocate a "hard" policy towards the Third Reich. The explanation was that their sympathies lay with the Liberals and Democrats in Germany (including the Social Democrats), whose position had, in their view been seriously weakened by the harsh policies after 1919 and who ended up among the principal victims of Hitler.

After war broke out there was much argument in Britain as to how many "good" Germans existed and what they were capable of achieving. Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister who had been responsible for "appeasing" Germany by granting her demands until Hitler demonstrated that this might be an endless process, said, when war broke out, that Britain "had no quarrel with the German people;" the war was only being fought to get rid of the Nazis, possibly even only to get rid of Hitler. Partly under pressure from the French, he began to change his mind when the German people showed no sign of turning against Hitler, especially when Hitler's policies led to victory over Poland! Churchill, even before he succeeded Chamberlain, argued that the enemy consisted not simply of Nazism but equally of German "Militarism," a phrase which presumably meant the German armed forces and the sections of society (particularly Prussian) which allowed them so much influence in the running of the country. A variant of this view was that the power of the German "militarists" rested on the big landowners, mainly in the East, and on the big industrialists, mainly in the West; the failure to deprive these groups of their economic and social power had been one of the main mistakes after 1919 and it must not be repeated. Their power however could hardly be broken without depriving them of their property and such expropriation was more popular with Socialists than with conservatives.

As the war went on and became more bitter, public opinion in Britain towards Germany hardened, among working-men as well as among the well-to-do, but the division between "hawks" and "doves" did not disappear. On January 23, 1941, a Committee in the Ministry of Information recorded that "the problem as to whether the German people could be identified with the Nazis had revealed considerable differences of opinion and it was unlikely that any guidance could be given on the matter."<sup>16</sup> The director-general of the organization responsible for propaganda to Germany recorded later that

after the debate on political warfare in February 1942 Mr. Eden . . . used to receive two separate Parliamentary Propaganda Committees. One Committee . . . complained querulously of our softness towards the Germans. The other Committee . . . with equal vigour protested against the harshness of our German propaganda.<sup>17</sup>

No doubt a similar divergence of view could be documented from the U.S.

The first advantage of the formula of unconditional surrender was that it avoided, or at least postponed, the invidious task of making a

choice between these two points of view (which was undoubtedly one of the reasons why the "doves" criticised it). Moreover, the division of opinion was not merely internal but international, particularly if the way in which the Germans were to be treated was to be taken as an indicator of the way the world in general should be regulated after the war. Here there were numerous matters on which the British and American Governments did not see eye-to-eye. Several of the countries occupied by the Germans were represented in London by governments-in-exile who, although limited in influence (since their very existence depended on British goodwill), nevertheless represented forces whose help was valuable and so could not be entirely disregarded; they naturally inclined towards "hardness." Above all, there was the question of securing an agreement with the Russians as to what was to happen to Germany after victory. Differences of view on this matter were liable to be so great that an early attempt to come to grips with it might well end in failure, which would hardly increase the enthusiasm of either side for continuing sacrifice toward a complete victory that would mainly benefit other people. Subsequent events have amply demonstrated what a wide discrepancy of view there was between East and West over Germany, so that any attempt to agree on a precise statement of intentions might have precipitated that very quarrel which, as the war went on, the Germans saw as providing their chief hope of avoiding complete defeat.

But "unconditional surrender" did more than avoid a discussion of war aims. In the months preceding its formulation, many of those who regarded the war as a crusade for democracy had been scandalized by the willingness of the American authorities in North Africa to make an agreement with Admiral Darlan by which political control in that area was left largely in the hands of the men who had served Vichy. There was widespread fear in Britain and America that the same thing might happen over Italy (as it did, in spite of unconditional surrender) and even over Germany (as it did not). As similar apprehension was shared by the Russians, who anyhow regarded "fascism" as a logical development of capitalism, and found it hard to believe that inveterate anti-Communists like Churchill would want to pursue their feud with German "militarism" to the point of completely undermining the established order in Europe. But demanding unconditional surrender was hardly compatible with negotiating a compromise peace.

Finally, unconditional surrender was a safeguard against repeating the mistake of 1918 when the Germans surrendered on the basis of



promises which they considered to have been made to them by President Wilson in his *Fourteen Points and Four Principles*, promises which, according to them, were inconsistent with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. To examine the amount of truth in this claim would be a detailed and lengthy business; part of the difficulty lies in the fact that each side had read its own interpretation into Wilson's words. But the Germans as a whole not only convinced themselves that they had been tricked into surrender, they persuaded, as has been already said, large sections of the British, American, and neutral publics to believe the same thing, and exploited the consciences of their former enemies to escape, by diplomatic negotiation, the consequences of military defeat (an exercise in which countries naturally engage after losing a war).

Robert Sherwood has written

As Roosevelt sat at the end of the long table in the Cabinet Room. . . during the war years, he would look up at the portrait of Woodrow Wilson over the mantelpiece. The tragedy of Wilson was always somewhere within the rim of his consciousness. Roosevelt could never forget Wilson's mistakes, which had been made with the noblest will in the world, impelled by the purest concept of the Christian ethic. Wilson had advocated "peace without victory," he had produced the Fourteen points as a basis on which Germany could surrender honourably. The violation of these principles had plagued the post-war world, had led to the rise of Hitler and a Second World War, and there was no motivating force in all of Roosevelt's wartime political policy stronger than the determination of the same mistakes.<sup>18</sup>

The lesson drawn was not that ideals should be put into practice—that was generally recognised to be asking too much of human nature—but that promises should not be held out. Unconditional surrender meant making no promises to which appeal could later be made and thus giving no "hostages to fortune." Churchill said in Parliament on February 22, 1944, that

Unconditional surrender means that the victors have a free hand. It does not mean that they are entitled to behave in a barbarous manner nor that they wish to blot out Germany from among the nations of Europe. If we are bound, we are bound by our own consciences to civilization. We are not bound to the Germans as the result of a bargain struck.

The suggestion has sometimes been made that the Anglo-American leaders did nevertheless make what amounted to promises and that they could not help doing in so far as through the war they habitually

represented themselves as humane, God-fearing, and law-abiding in contrast to the brutal, lawless Nazis. The Germans could always after the war was over ask whether the way they were being treated was compatible with the Allied "conscience to civilization." The claim was sometimes heard that "total defeat means total responsibility," coupled with a demand that the victors discharge that responsibility by providing Germans with a tolerable standard of life and a united country. But such arguments are harder to deploy than appeals to precise texts and they were not in fact much used. The years since 1945 have not seen the same kind of recriminations which followed 1918—perhaps because they have been replaced by recriminations between East and West. Some effort was made to appeal to the Atlantic Charter but this could be met by the reminder that it was not a contractual document (had it been, it would have required ratification by Parliament and Congress) and thus bound nobody but the two signatories, who had both vanished from the scene by the time the war ended. Moreover, Churchill, in the 1944 statement quoted above, said flatly that the Charter did not apply to Germany *as of right* (although some anti-Nazi Germans had taken for granted that it did).

### THE CASE AGAINST THE FORMULA

In the three ways described in the last section, the demand for unconditional surrender offered substantial advantages. Therefore its abandonment would only have been justified if there was a prospect of gaining even more solid ones by so doing. What then were and are the arguments for offering to make peace on clearly-stated conditions?

As has been said, the question has two sides—the formula of surrender and the character of surrender. The argument brought against the formula is that the very uncertainty as to what the terms might be in itself deterred the Germans from surrendering. If they had been told what the terms were, they would have accepted them, no matter how harsh.

This is what Churchill denied in his reminiscences. The most notable proponent of the view was Stalin, who put it forth one evening during the Teheran Conference, on a night when Roosevelt had become unwell and retired early, so that the President afterwards denied all knowledge of the matter. In a speech a year earlier Stalin had said that

it would be ludicrous to identify Hitler's clique with the German people. History indicates that Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the German state remain.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to the conference the Russians had been suggesting to the National Committee for Free Germany, which they had induced some of their German prisoners-of-war to form, that if as a result of the Committee's activities an uprising could be brought about in Germany before the Red Army reached the frontier, Germany would be allowed to keep her 1939 frontiers, the Wehrmacht would be allowed to continue, and a bourgeois democratic government could be set up.<sup>20</sup> But in Dr. Feis' view such hints and demi-promises were revealed at Teheran to be only tactical deceptions.<sup>21</sup> Nearly two years earlier Stalin had proposed to Eden the restoration of Austria as an independent state, the transfer of East Prussia to Poland, and the return of the Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia<sup>22</sup>—all of which were incompatible with Germany's retention of her 1939 frontiers. At the Conference he argued for dismembering the country and insisted on the need for adequate measures to hold it down. He taunted Churchill as one desirous of giving Germany a "soft" peace, and proposed liquidating 50,000, perhaps 100,000 of the "commanding staff" (though Bohlen, who was interpreting for Roosevelt and was better acquainted with the Russian mentality, was sure that this was intended as a joke<sup>23</sup>). It is hard to believe Stalin really thought that the announcement of such terms would hasten the end of the war, which makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the terms he intended to announce were not ones he intended to keep. But then his conscience was unlikely to have been sensitive to charges of bad faith.

Another line of argument has been that the formula involved a confusion between military and political concepts. What the U.S. Chiefs of Staff called for in 1942 was the unconditional surrender of the enemy's "armed forces." In mid-1944, the State Department agreed that the term *bedingungslose Waffenniederlegung* (laying-down of weapons) should be used in American propaganda as the translation of the formula.<sup>24</sup> A logical distinction can certainly be drawn between this action and the acceptance by a defeated government of whatever lasting settlement the victors might choose to impose. And when the beaten armies did agree to lay down their arms unconditionally, they were at once presented with a list of detailed "conditions" which they were required to fulfill. Yet the suggestion that the surrender thus became conditional cannot really be sustained. Once a government's

armed forces have laid down their weapons, the government becomes powerless to resist—except passively—any orders which the conqueror may choose to give, while the “conditions” presented to it or to its armed forces are better described as “requirements,” since little or no argument is possible about them. In the case of Germany, of course, those requirements included the dissolution of the government without immediate indigenous replacement. Had the Allies emphasized more that it was only the laying-down of arms which was to be done unconditionally, interest would at once have been transferred to the question of what political “conditions” were to be considered as following from the capitulation. It was not the exact way in which the Wehrmacht was to behave after capitulation which interested the public, but such things as disarmament, supplies, frontiers, and reparations.

The main argument in favour of modifying the demand for unconditional surrender is the belief that thereby the war could have been shortened, reducing considerably the suffering and material damage caused to all belligerents. If, moreover, the Germans could have been induced to surrender while their troops were still outside the country’s frontiers, the Russians would never have reached Central Europe and a more or less intact Wehrmacht would have remained in existence to shield that area. A conditional surrender would also have implied a German government with which to negotiate the conditions, a government which would not have accepted terms involving its dissolution. But if such a government had retained the authority to run the country as a single unit, the division into East and West would not have occurred, Poland and Czechoslovakia would have become less vulnerable and Soviet power would thus have been both less substantial and more distant.

These advantages would not however have resulted automatically from a mere decision to offer conditions of surrender. They imply also decisions not to occupy or dismember the country, not to take over the government and not to demand complete disarmament. But these were all steps on which the victors were determined (though they changed their minds later about dismemberment—only to bring it about unintentionally). The argument has moved from formula to character and it becomes appropriate to ask what were the minimum terms which an anti-Nazi movement in Germany would have needed in order to succeed.

A subject which was often supposed to loom large was economic treatment after defeat. Was Germany to be de-industrialised, as the Mor-

genthau Plan had suggested, or have her standard of living drastically reduced? What would be exacted from her in the shape of reparations? But even in announcing the demand for unconditional surrender, Roosevelt had said that it did not mean the destruction of the population of Germany. Churchill, broadcasting after the signing of the Atlantic Charter, had stressed that it was not in the interests of the world as a whole that any large nation should be unprosperous or shut off from the means of making a living for itself by its industry and enterprise. Before hostilities ended, the Allied leaders had made at least six further statements along these lines. Given the supply conditions which would obviously obtain in the world the war, and the danger of making precise commitments when there could be no certainty of being in a position to carry them out, no reasonable person could have asked for more. And as Churchill told Roosevelt on November 24, 1944,

I do not think the Germans are much afraid of the treatment they will get from the British and American Armies and Governments. What they are afraid of is a Russian occupation and a large proportion of their people being taken off to toil to death in Russia or Siberia.<sup>25</sup>

The assertion has often been made that "unconditional surrender" was used by Nazi propaganda to convince the Germans that the loss of the war would be infinitely worse than their present sufferings. The British Chiefs of Staff, in pressing in February 1944 for a statement to be made about the future of Germany, said there was ample evidence that such talk was having its effect and was the chief factor in inducing the civilian population to continue the struggle.<sup>26</sup> Goebbels is quoted as having called the formula "an epoch-making asininity of the first order. I could never myself have thought of such a compelling slogan for my propaganda."<sup>27</sup> But he did not say this until a year after Casablanca and then only in private, to an adjutant. The U.S. Foreign Broadcasting Intelligence Service of the Federal Communications Commission told the State Department, in May 1944, that the terms had been "rarely used" in German propaganda.<sup>28</sup> My impressions, based on detailed study of that propaganda, coincide more with those of the FCC monitors than with the Chiefs of Staff. The first directive which the German media received about the Casablanca Conference was that "there is no reason why the unsuccessful meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill should receive much prominence."<sup>29</sup> Neither that directive nor the

notice circulated by the German News Agency for publication mentioned the formula. It did not feature in the great speech on total war which Goebbels made at the Sportpalast three-and-a-half weeks later, and only three references to it were noticed during the whole of February and March 30, 1943.

Once again, however, it is necessary to distinguish between the formula and what lay behind it. Goebbels of course frequently tried to make the blood of the German people run cold by painting lurid pictures of what would happen to them if their country was defeated. But the sort of fate which he predicted was the castration of the entire male population, the removal of all German children into captivity on the pretext of "reeducation" and the sending of many millions to forced labour in Siberia.<sup>31</sup> Since "unconditional surrender" as such did not imply any such severities, he may well have thought the formula too weak for his purposes. In addition, attacks on the formula for vagueness might have provoked the Allies into making their intentions more precise, which would hardly have suited his book, while continued Allied insistence on it was hard to square with the hopes he often held out of Germany being rescued by a quarrel between the Anglo-Americans and the Russians.

### THE CHARACTER OF A CONDITIONAL SURRENDER

The soldiers and civilians inside Germany, who were trying to bring about Hitler's overthrow were certainly anxious to establish contact with the Allies and obtain a reassuring declaration about the way Germany would be treated after a coup. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, they were very conscious that, if they killed or even displaced the head of the government in the middle of a war, they would be regarded as traitors by many of their countrymen and might easily start off another "stab-in-the-back" legend. They were driven on to act by their awareness that every extra day of Nazi rule saw the deaths of a number of innocent victims and the belief that the only way to prevent the German nation as a whole from being saddled permanently with the blame for such deaths was for somebody to act before it was too obvious that defeat was inevitable. They believed that, if they could

remove or kill Hitler before the Allies did it for them, they would be acting in the best interests of Germany. But they were well aware that, if the Allies then proceeded to impose another "hard" peace, they might be considered by their fellow-countrymen to have acted against the best interests of Germany and have initiated a worse state of affairs than would have resulted from obeying Nazi orders to the bitter end. And whereas the colonels were prepared to take a chance, it was considerations of this sort which deterred the more sympathetic of the commanding generals, who carried more responsibility thanks to the very fact that they possessed more authority.

The hope, therefore, was that satisfactory assurances obtained from Britain and America would remove the doubts of one or more generals and induce him or them to lead the revolt. This would further ease the conspirators' task, because it would remove the need to start the revolt by killing Hitler. The colonels were driven to plan assassination because they thought that the only way of forcing the generals into action was to present them with a *fait accompli*. But even for someone willing to kill Hitler, it was obvious that access to him was easier said than done.

What concerned all these people was not the economic condition of Germany. They wanted to secure a cessation of hostilities in the West in order to have their hands free in the East—and some went even so far as to hope for Western help against the Russians. If, in defining "unconditional surrender," the Allies had told such men that the German armed forces and the general staff were going to be completely disbanded, the entire country was to be occupied on a tripartite basis, Germany was going to be left for the time being without a central government, all German territory east of the Oder-Neisse line was going to be taken away, not to mention Austria and the Sudetenland, and several millions of Germans might be required to do reconstruction work in Russia—they would have felt that their worst fears were being realised. Any temptation which they felt to hasten the end of the war by overthrowing Hitler would have vanished, along with any chance of carrying their superiors with them. Churchill was quite right to say that a frank statement of what the Allies had in mind for Germany would not have a reassuring effect. Indeed it was precisely because Churchill and Roosevelt suspected the anti-Nazi Germans of being anxious, as good patriots, to spare Germany from the full consequences of her defeat that they persistently refused all the many proposals made to them for negotiations with the *Widerstand*.

It was not, of course, with soldiers and industrialists like Beck and Goerdeler that the British and American advocates of a conditional peace offer intended to deal. They would probably have made louder protests against such a deal than they did against the agreements with Darlan and Badoglio. The kind of people whom they had in mind were the workers, the Christians, and the democrats. Not merely did they have illusions about the outlook of some of these people (assuming too easily that German bishops and professors were just like bishops and professors at home), but they also exaggerated their numbers and completely left out of account how hard it is for private individuals to organize resistance to a totalitarian state. All that an ordinary German could do against the regime was to collect and pass on information, give surreptitious help to victims of persecution, and otherwise try, in minor ways, to lessen the sum of human misery; Anything more positive was almost bound sooner or later to come to the notice of the authorities and result in arrest and possibly death. The only people in a position to do the planning essential for a successful coup were those inside organizations which had some protection against penetration by Nazi agents—the General Staff, the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces, the Foreign Office, the Nazi Party itself, and, to a certain extent other parts of the civil service. The events of July 20th showed how hard it was even for these people to plan thoroughly. Failure to realise these unpalatable facts rendered wishful the thinking of many British and American “men of good will” about how to end the war and what to do thereafter. A recent writer has said that the nonrealisation of the hope of a rising inside Germany was the greatest single ideological blow to the left during the whole war.<sup>32</sup>

But if the only people inside Germany who had any chance of ousting Hitler were soldiers, officials and disaffected Nazis, and if even they, to ensure success, needed to get the backing of generals, then the nature of the conditions which the Allies would have had to offer becomes clear. To win over the military, the British and Americans would have had to provide clear evidence that they were not going to take seriously all that they had said about eradicating militarism. Generals cannot be expected to cooperate in putting themselves out of business.

It was not as though the German officer corps were without an alternative. They could only too easily take the line of least resistance and leave matters to run their course. Though they must have realised from September 1944 onwards what happens when amateur strategists



take the management of a war out of the hands of professionals. Of course, the Nazi answer was that the loss of the war was due to disaffection among the professionals, but people who said as much were going to be so discredited anyhow that few would listen to them. Any punishment which the Allies might inflict on officers was less certain and might well be less severe than that which, as the aftermath of the July attempt showed, Hitler would certainly inflict on unsuccessful attempts to challenge him.

One consequence of this attitude was that if Roosevelt and Churchill were set on imposing a hard peace, including total occupation, demilitarization and the surrender of German territory (essential if Britain was to keep any sort of faith with the Poles), they could only do so after achieving total victory. As it was highly doubtful whether they could achieve such victory at a tolerable price with their own resources unaided, they had to keep the Russians in the European War (not to mention the Pacific one) until the end, and they therefore had to pursue a policy acceptable to the Russians. This meant that if conditions were to be specified with any sincerity, they would need to be hard ones. "Unconditional surrender" thus had not only the effect of avoiding commitment to a soft peace but it also represented about the only possible way of satisfying the Russians without commitment to an extremely hard peace. It did not, as events showed, stop the *Widerstand* from attempting to get rid of Hitler, though it may have condemned those attempts to failure, and events in the West showed that it did not prove a serious deterrent to surrender by front-line troops.

The real issue of war-time policy was therefore not the wisdom of refusing to define terms of surrender but the wisdom of insisting on breaking the military power of Germany more clearly and durably than had been done in 1918.

Three arguments can be advanced against such insistence. Critics on the right may say that it deprived the West of the resources of an undivided Germany in withstanding the Russians and had to be undone within ten years in order to secure the resources of two-thirds of Germany for NATO. This assumes that an undivided and undisarmed Germany (which would probably have acquired a nuclear capacity at some point) would have thrown in her lot with the West, and not tried to play off West against East to her own advantage. Critics on the left may say that the present Federal Republic does not differ essentially from the Third Reich in being a capitalist economy in which nationalists possess influence. When it came to the point, the American occupation

authorities refused to deprive the industrialists of their possessions and prevented the British Labour Government from nationalising the coal and steel industries, so that the object of going on to the bitter end—namely to be able to bring about radical change—was not achieved. But this view assumes that a change in the ownership of industry and property was the only change which mattered. It disregards the experience of undisputed total defeat through which all Germans now over thirty years old have been. It ignores the influence of the Allies in framing the political systems in the Federal Republic. Above all, it disregards the fact of partition.

A third argument is that, if any of the attempts made on Hitler in 1943 and 1944 had succeeded, the Allies would have reached a compromise peace with whatever regime the Germans set up thereafter. But that is a large assumption. The character of that regime is almost impossible to guess, and there are some (e.g., one dominated by the SS) which the Allies would not have accepted. The sequel might have been civil war, in which the Allies might have had to intervene to restore order. Moreover, the Allies would not have accepted. The sequel might have been civil war, in which the Allies would certainly not have made peace on whatever terms the Germans happened to offer, and if they had insisted on conditions unacceptable to the Germans, the fighting might have had to go on.

### THE OBSTINATE DUTCHMAN

What needs however to be emphasized is that speculations of this kind are all quite unrealistic. There never was any prospect, after 1941, of Anglo-American policy being modified to the extent necessary to provide a basis for compromise. In Britain the advocates of a soft peace were more vocal than numerous. Mass observation obtained the following answers <sup>33</sup> to the question "What should be done with Germany after the war?"

	<i>Date of Poll</i>				
	<i>May 1942</i>	<i>October 1942</i>	<i>May 1943</i>	<i>June 1944</i>	<i>April 1945</i>
<i>% Favouring a</i>					
“Preventive solution	34	30	33	36	44
“Revengeful” solution	24	32	26	28	28
“Constructive solution	23	8	19	20	7
Other	1	4	5	4	8
No opinion	18	26	17	12	13

Moreover wide sections of the public (including many of the advocates of a “soft” peace) were filled with a somewhat naive admiration for Russia, stimulated by the consciousness that, though the Russians might be motivated by considerations of self-interest, their success had been the chief factor rescuing Britain from stalemate, if not from defeat. Until 1945 any government move which involved a break with Russia would have split both the Cabinet and the country from top to bottom. The leading Labour Ministers in the coalition government were, as has been mentioned, firm as to the need for a victory which would enable drastic measures to be taken in Germany. Above all, the prime minister was determined to go through to total victory, though it was his intention (as the title page of his history indicates) to show magnanimity thereafter. The events of 1942 demonstrated that there was no likelihood of his being displaced unless his military plans continued to miscarry, when he would have been superseded by someone thought more capable of prosecuting the war vigorously. Finally his freedom of action was limited by his desire to get strategic concessions out of Roosevelt and by his awareness that, in the immediate post-war years, the country would starve without U.S. good-will. Even if he and his ministers had felt convinced that Roosevelt was being overly severe towards Germany, they would not have thought it a matter worth a quarrel.

A British writer is not qualified to say how the American people would have reacted to the conclusion of a compromise peace with an army-dominated German government, though he may suspect that it would not have been very different. What is clear, however, is that one person who would never have made such a deal is Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was his steady refusal to consider interpretations of unconditional surrender which led General Marshall to describe him

as "an obstinate Dutchman."<sup>34</sup> When, in March 1944, his military and civilian advisers proposed the issue of such an interpretation, his reply was

I cannot agree with the proposed statement or the advisability thereof.

The trouble is that the reasoning presupposes a reconstituting of a German state which would give active co-operation—apparently at once—to peace in Europe.

A somewhat long study and personal experience in and out of Germany leads me to believe that the German philosophy cannot be changed by decree, law or military order. The change in German philosophy must be evolutionary and may take two generations.

To assume otherwise is to assume of necessity a period of quiet followed by a Third World War.

I think that the simplest way of approaching this whole subject would be to stick to what I have already said (a) that the United Nations are determined to administer a total defeat to Germany as a whole (b) that the Allies have no intention of destroying the German people.

Please note that I am not willing at this time to say that we do not intend to destroy the German nation. As long as the word Reich exists in Germany as expressing a nationhood, it will forever be associated with the present form of nationhood. If we admit that, we must seek to eliminate the word *Reich* and all that it stands for.<sup>35</sup>

Six months later, in attacking as too lenient the first draft of the SHAEF Civil Affairs Handbook for Germany, he said

To many people here and in England hold to the view that the German people as a whole are not responsible for what has taken place—that only a few nazi leaders are responsible. That unfortunately is not based on fact. The German people as a whole must have it brought home to them that the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization.<sup>36</sup>

It is true that he twice sent to Churchill drafts of proposed statements and that the responsibility for turning these down, on the ground that they were likely to be distorted by the Nazis into a peace appeal, lay with the British Cabinet.<sup>37</sup> But the text of these statements did more to emphasize the certainty of German defeat and the consequent futility of further resistance than to hint at any relaxation of the terms on which surrender would be acceptable.

Some may consider that this was Roosevelt's greatest mistake and that he should never have enunciated the formula of unconditional surrender at all, or advocated the hard policy which went with it. But

for him not to have done so, he clearly would have had to be a different man. And had he—or Churchill—been different, the course of history would have been altered in many other incalculable ways and not simply in this momentous but particular respect.

## NOTES

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