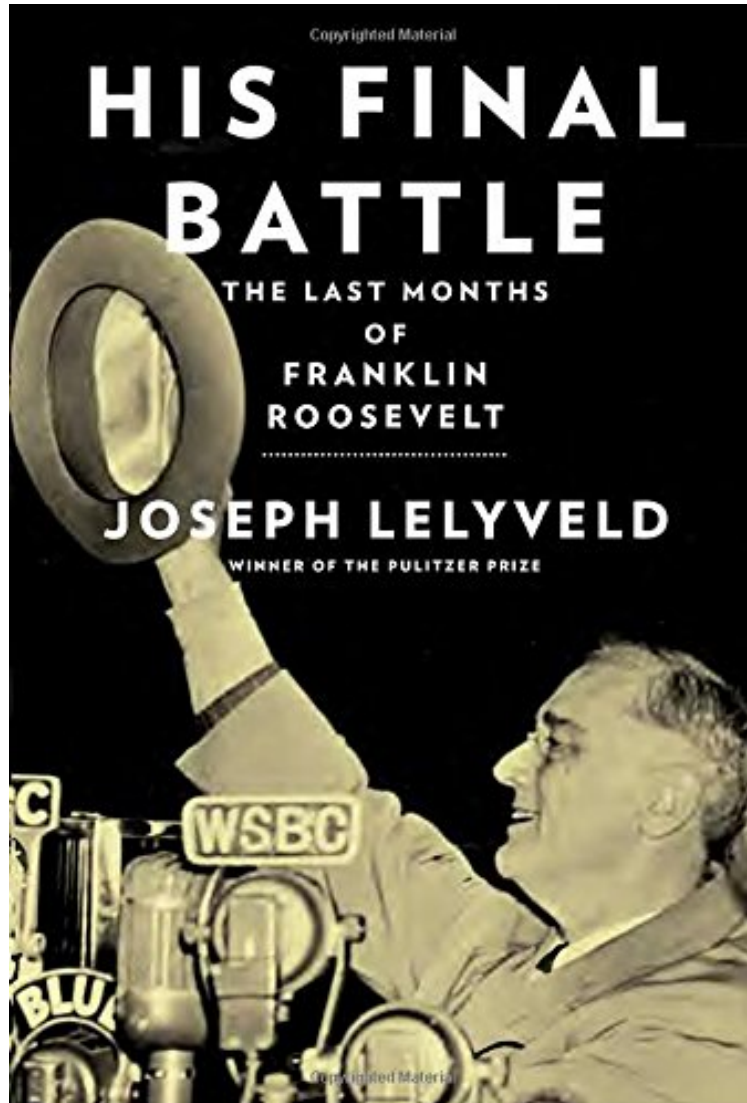


(Download pdf ebook) His Final Battle: The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt

His Final Battle: The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt

Joseph Lelyveld

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Joseph Lelyveld : His Final Battle: The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised His Final Battle: The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt:

46 of 48 people found the following review helpful. Very readable account of FDR's last monthsBy Phelps GatesLelyveld is a journalist rather than a historian. So don't look for new revelations or discoveries, especially in view of the extremely well-plowed nature of this particular field. The strong point of the book is the vivid picture that he paints of Roosevelt's final months, and the analysis of what was going on behind the scenes. This was a particularly

critical year in history, and one where America really did have a rendezvous with destiny, and the author gives a highly readable account of what was happening: the Tehran and Yalta summits, the debate over a fourth term, the choice of Truman as running mate, the Polish question, the birth of the UN, and, through it all, the underlying question of FDR's health. Since his medical records mysteriously disappeared after his death, we often have to rely on subjective descriptions by people who were with him, photographs taken at the time, and his writings and speeches. Lelyveld does a very good job of sifting the evidence to decide just how impaired his faculties were in those last months. And his analysis of Roosevelt's character, quite apart from health issues, is incisive: one of the best chapters is his comparison of FDR with Woodrow Wilson, pointing out the many parallels (I was reminded of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* here). The book goes into lots of interesting details about FDR's last year of life, much of which was new to me, including the full context of his Fala quip (perhaps one reason for the presidential pooch making it into the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington!), the "rest cure" at Bernard Baruch's estate, and the maneuverings over his Vice-Presidential choice. Lots of interesting material.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "Let us move forward with firm and active faith." By lb136 Joseph Lelyveld, who presided over the New York Times at the end of its golden age as a printed newspaper, in this fascinating history describes the end of another golden age--the end of the era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Covering the period from the Tehran conference of November 1943, in which FDR promised Stalin that D-Day would occur by the end of May 1944 (it was only six days late) to his death in April 1945, the author portrays the weakening president determined to carry on although suffering from, among other things, an enlarged heart. In order to reconstruct the physical condition of the weakening president's last days, the author is forced to rely on diaries and comments made by his doctors, McIntyre and Bruenn, because his medical records mysteriously "vanished" in 1946. Fortunately he does his job well, and the tale is fascinating. Then, too, there are the quick sketches of the historical figures (Truman, Churchill and Stalin, of course, as well as lesser known figures of the time) and the machinations that FDR employed while seeking a fourth term. Perhaps he couldn't face up to his approaching end, but he was astute enough to have replaced Henry Wallace, his third-term vice president, with Harry Truman. One of the figures who played a significant role behind the scenes was FDR's daughter, Anna--this was new to me. It would be Anna who would accompany the president to the infamous Yalta conference, where Churchill, Stalin, and FDR met for the final time. (Mr. Lelyveld, by the way, is not one of those who think FDR gave away the store to Stalin at that conference, although as he tells us certainly his attention span was not what it once was.) Underlying it all was FDR's determination to create a working United Nations, something his first boss, Woodrow Wilson, whom he served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, had been unable to do. And Mr. Lelyveld works wonders with this material. I almost teared up as he describes how the president was making plans to attend the opening session of the UN on April 25, 1945. (A draft of the radio address FDR planned to make on Jefferson Day, April 15, exists, in which he would have said, of the UN, "The work, my friends, is peace.") Truman, of course, would go. The war was won. And, as Mr. Lelyveld notes, when Japan surrendered, Truman "addressed the nation, pronouncing the name Roosevelt only once, in a single-sentence tribute simultaneously reverential and spare, showing that his predecessor was already receding into history." Sic transit.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Drama, Courage, Failing Health with WWII As Background By mishmish This is a very detailed account of the last months of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his fourth and last election and his death before the end of World War II. Most of these events are well known and have appeared in countless books, films and images, but here we have a more intimate picture of the ailing president as he tried to end the war and prepare for the post-war period and a real peace. His relationships with his wife Eleanor, his daughter Anna and Lucy Mercer, the woman he loved, are also developed. In spite of his obviously deteriorating health he travelled thousands of miles to Teheran and Yalta to meet with Stalin and Churchill. Stalin, with his usual ruthlessness, refused to leave the territory of the Soviet Union, so it was Roosevelt, handicapped by his paralysis and an obviously failing heart, who was obliged to make these journeys by car, ship, plane and rail. Today, of course, a president does not have four terms in office and it would be difficult (I hope) for a president to continue in office in obviously failing health, but we have to admire FDR's courage and tenacity in carrying on to complete his legacy and prepare for the post-war world.

A New York Times 2016 Notable Book "By far the most enigmatic leading figure" of World War II. That's how the British military historian John Keegan described Franklin D. Roosevelt, who frequently left his contemporaries guessing, never more so than at the end of his life. Here, in a hugely insightful account, a prizewinning author and journalist untangles the narrative threads of Roosevelt's final months, showing how he juggled the strategic, political, and personal choices he faced as the war, his presidency, and his life raced in tandem to their climax. The story has been told piecemeal but never like this, with a close focus on Roosevelt himself and his hopes for a stable international order after the war, and how these led him into a prolonged courtship of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator, involving secret, arduous journeys to Tehran and the Crimea. In between, as the war entered its final phase, came the thunderbolt of a dire medical diagnosis, raising urgent questions about the ability of the longest-serving president to stand for a fourth term at a time when he had little choice. Neither his family nor top figures in his administration were informed of his diagnosis, let alone the public or his closest ally, Winston Churchill. With D-Day looming, Roosevelt took a

month off on a plantation in the south where he was examined daily by a navy cardiologist, then waited two more months before finally announcing, on the eve of his party's convention, that he'd be a candidate. A political grand master still, he manipulated the selection of a new running mate, with an eye to a possible succession, displaying some of his old vigor and wit in a winning campaign. With precision and compassion, Joseph Lelyveld examines the choices Roosevelt faced, shining new light on his state of mind, preoccupations, and motives, both as leader of the wartime alliance and in his personal life. Confronting his own mortality, Roosevelt operated in the belief that he had a duty to see the war through to the end, telling himself he could always resign if he found he couldn't carry on. Lelyveld delivers an incisive portrait of this deliberately inscrutable man, a consummate leader to the very last.

A New York Times Notable Book of 2016 "A gripping, deeply human account... Moving, elegiac." —The New York Times Book "Splendid and richly detailed... President Roosevelt won reelection in November, was inaugurated in January, and died in April, three months into his fourth term. After that came the cold war and atomic weapons and a new diplomatic policy called 'mutual assured destruction.' Lelyveld shows with clarity and shrewd judgment how it came about." —The New York of Books "Psychologically intense... Pinning down FDR's innermost thoughts is always an elusive goal for a scholar, but Lelyveld... has the fortitude and skill to properly analyze FDR's decision-making process. What makes His Final Battle so exceptional is Lelyveld's admirable ability to write nonfiction with highly stylized lyrical beauty." —The Washington Post "Gripping... Masterfully told... Lelyveld brings to this project a complex mind (but approachable language) equal to Roosevelt's complex character (but comforting rhetoric)... A heroic and poignant picture." —The Boston Globe "A compellingly nuanced, almost day-by-day account of the great man's final year of life." —Time "A careful, somber and sometimes harrowing account of FDR's last 16 months... [Lelyveld's] full and disciplined investigation of an important theme makes a significant contribution to FDR scholarship." —The Wall Street Journal "A gripping book that will substantially deepen readers' understanding of a critical time in U.S. history." —Foreign Affairs "Joseph Lelyveld combines his long-honed reporting experience with a historian's eye firmly fixed on this important story... Chock full of illuminating revelations... If you are faintly nauseated by the current state of American politics, turn off the cable channel that appeals to your prejudices, and let Mr. Lelyveld take you to a vastly more enlightening time when the main characters had plenty of flaws but also vastly compensating bravery and vision." —The Washington Times "Lelyveld's storytelling skill, his investigative thoroughness and his total dedication to historical fact remain evident throughout... Intense and substantive." —The Buffalo News "Rarely has Franklin Delano Roosevelt been portrayed with such steely-eyed insight... A deeply revealing look at a famously enigmatic president... A masterful study of a masterful politician, a fresh look at one of the most beloved and complex of presidents." —BookPage "Meticulous... The author expertly puts together a string of poignant clues to FDR's last acts... An elegant, affecting work that offers fresh insights on a much-mythologized president." —Kirkus, starred review "Joseph Lelyveld traces the last, challenging months of FDR's life with a pitch-perfect blend of meticulous reporting, careful analysis, and deep humanity. For all that has been written about Roosevelt, this deeply-moving book adds significantly to our understanding of that remarkable man." —Gay Talese "With a seasoned journalist's built-in skepticism and a gifted historian's scrupulous respect for evidence, Joseph Lelyveld leads us deeper into Franklin Roosevelt's 'thickly forested interior' at the end of his life than anyone has ever gone before. His Final Battle is now required reading for anyone who wants to understand the twentieth century's most consequential—and most mysterious—president." —Geoffrey C. Ward, author, *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History* "A spellbinding example of the biographer's craft, His Final Battle by Joseph Lelyveld paints a portrait of Franklin Roosevelt as president, statesman, and commander in chief, frail and dying, but heroic in his resolve to win the war and preserve the peace that would follow. Deftly interweaving the public and the private, the political and the personal, making use of documents and details others had neglected, Lelyveld offers us an unparalleled historical narrative of the last year of the war and the dramatic story of a singular man and the unthinkable challenges he confronted in the final months of his presidency and his life." —David Nasaw, author, *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* "A masterpiece, in dramatic prose, combining deep research, subtle imagination, and ingenious speculation, as well as a vivid analysis of 'The Great Tantalizer,' the 'devout utilitarian.' His Final Battle is the work of a seasoned reporter/historian, elegantly written, hard to put down and impossible to forget." —Fritz Stern, author, *Five Germanys I Have Known* "Powerful, clear-eyed, and briskly-told, Lelyveld's account of the last months of a 20th century colossus is great history. It's a wonder Franklin Roosevelt was ever able to get out of bed, let alone guide the Allies through the most perilous period the world had ever known. If you think you knew FDR, think again—Joe Lelyveld brings him to fresh life, in all his human dimensions." —Timothy Egan, author, *The Immortal Irishman* "At once human and analytical, His Final Battle illuminates the perplexing zone where personal fate and large historical processes intertwine. The book offers a beautifully-realized, impossible to put down chronicle making fresh connections that deepen understanding of FDR's closing confrontations with crises of health and global leadership." —Ira I. Katznelson, author of *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* About the Author JOSEPH LELYVELD spent nearly four decades as a reporter and editor at The New York Times, and served as executive editor from 1994 to 2001. This is his third book since then, following *Great Soul: Mahatma*

Gandhi and His Struggle with India and Omaha Blues: A Memory Loop. An earlier book on apartheid, *Move Your Shadow: South Africa, Black and White*, won the Pulitzer Prize. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Chapter 1 Uncle Joe in Tehran

Joseph Stalin may have been the first person with whom Franklin Roosevelt openly discussed the likelihood that he might have to seek a fourth term. For ten days -toward the end of 1943, first in Cairo, then Tehran, the president had deflected every entreaty from Winston Churchill for a private meeting in order to avoid giving any impression to the Russians that the Americans and the British were secretly cooking up negotiating tactics between themselves for the first -three--power summit of the war. Once in Tehran, he seized every opportunity for private meetings with the Soviet dictator; in four days, they had three. At the last of these, on December 1, 1943, Roosevelt said he needed to speak frankly about American politics. The coming year would be an election year, and if the war were still raging, he said, he might have to stand again, although that was not his wish. There were millions of voters of Polish -background—six or seven million, he -said—and if he ran, he would need their votes. There were also blocs of voters with roots in the three Baltic states, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, which Moscow had absorbed into the Soviet Union. Their votes counted too. The United States would never go to war over the Baltics, the president said, and he personally understood the Soviet wish to shift the Polish border to the west for reasons of security. But until the election, then a little less than a year off, he could not, would not, enter into any negotiations on these matters. Roosevelt was flying solo here. There were seventy persons in his delegation at Tehran, including six Filipino cooks and stewards normally assigned to the USS *Potomac*, the presidential yacht, and the new weekend retreat called -Shangri--La (later, Camp David). But there -wasn't a single official from the State Department in Washington and only one diplomat from the ranks of the foreign service. This was Charles Bohlen, known as Chip, a young Russia specialist who'd been summoned from the embassy in Moscow on short notice to serve as an interpreter for a president he'd never met. That president would not once turn to him for advice at the summit. The Allied foreign ministers had just gathered in Moscow, but Roosevelt's secretary of state, Cordell Hull, who was used, if not resigned, to being bypassed by his president, -hadn't been invited to join him in Tehran. Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister, was there. So was Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary. This left Harry Hopkins, a social worker in his earliest days, then an administrator of key New Deal programs, as the top American fixer on the scene. When the foreign ministers gathered for lunch, it was Hopkins who sat in for the United States. Everyone understood that -Hopkins—who habitually bypassed the State Department chain of command, just like his -chief—wielded more power and influence than Hull. The president's -right--hand man dismissed State Department specialists as “old maids” and -“cookie--pushers” and “pansies,” echoing the president's sentiments if not his language. But even Hopkins was not included in Roosevelt's private meetings with Stalin. What the president had to say had been brewing in his own mind since the early months of the war. He'd long since signaled to Churchill that he saw the taming and courtship of Stalin as his personal project, a crucial step on the road to the international order that would have to be built on the ruins of war. It was a project he'd pursue all the way to Yalta, which was followed within two months by his death. In his -mind's eye, Stalin was the key to victory and the postwar world. At times, it would seem, the dictator became something more than the president's project, an indispensable -reason—in his own mind, the leading -rationale—for his carrying on. “I know that you will not mind my being brutally frank,” he said in a handwritten letter to Churchill on March 18, 1942, “when I tell you that I think I can personally handle Stalin better than either your Foreign Office or my State Department. Stalin hates the guts of all your top people. He thinks he likes me better, and I hope he will continue to do so.” Three weeks later, he was writing to Stalin to suggest a summertime meeting “near our common border off Alaska.” “The whole question of whether we win or lose the war depends on the Russians,” he remarked to his Treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau Jr., at about the same time. “If the Russians can hold out this summer and keep three and a half million Germans engaged in war, we can definitely win.” The Russians held out, but Stalin stayed in the Kremlin. In December, the president pressed the dictator again, this time to join him and Churchill in a secret meeting “in some secure place in Africa that is convenient to the three of us.” To each appeal, the dictator replied tersely that he -couldn't leave Moscow, given huge battles looming or under way. If satisfied with American arms deliveries and invasion plans, he expressed regrets; if impatient, he left them off. Roosevelt pressed on. By May 1943, he was again proposing Alaska “either on your side or my side of [the] Bering Straits.” This time he sent Joseph E. Davies, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union, to hand deliver a letter to Stalin in the Kremlin. In it, the president raised and then ruled out Iceland as a possible rendezvous point, in part because that “would make it, quite frankly, difficult not to invite Prime Minister Churchill at the same time.” Stretching the truth in a manner that can hardly be called uncharacteristic, he then wrote to Churchill denying he'd suggested a meeting that would exclude the prime minister. In June, he dispatched Averell Harriman, another of his special representatives operating outside State Department channels, to Churchill to win his approval of a -Roosevelt--Stalin meeting that would do just that. Churchill had already met Stalin, Harriman pointed out, and the president should have the same opportunity to establish a personal relationship. The prime minister -wasn't persuaded. “A meeting between the heads of Soviet Russia and the United States at this juncture with the British Commonwealth and Empire excluded,” he wrote to Roosevelt, would be a boon to Nazi propaganda and a “serious and vexatious” blow to Britain. In plain language, which the master stylist refrained from deploying on this occasion, it would signify the downgrading of Britain from

the status of an equal partner in the alliance to a supporting role. (Roosevelt had learned the hard way that it was useless to talk to the prime minister about the end of empire, having once, in early 1942, raised the subject of India in a late-night conversation at the White House. Churchill threw a tantrum and threatened to resign if ever pressed to offer early self-determination to India as part of the war effort.) Such a slippage in Britain's imperial sway, Roosevelt clearly felt, would be not only inevitable but desirable in the postwar world he could sometimes glimpse in his mind's eye. Moreover, in his readiness to see Western colonialism rolled back, he imagined he was staking out potential common ground between himself and Stalin and thus the United States and Russia. His fixation on Stalin from the early days, before American entry into the war—on what he personally might make of their relationship—reveals his remarkable self-confidence, crossing over now and then into realms of fantasy. It also shows his confounding, sometimes dazzling, ability to operate simultaneously on several planes as visionary, opportunist, and political schemer, as well as his readiness to test a hypothesis in politics like a scientist in a lab, or an entrepreneur with a risky business plan daring to make a deal. The hypothesis, as he put it to Hopkins in this instance, was that the dictator was “get-at-able,” a potential partner in peace as well as war. His method of getting at Stalin would be to lure him into a pattern of cooperation by going to extreme lengths to prove the United States a dependable, compliant partner. “The big question which rightly dominated Roosevelt's mind,” Anthony Eden wrote, describing a long evening's conversation with the president in March 1943, “was whether it was possible to work with Russia now and after the war.” Even if the answer proved negative, Eden replied, “We should make the position no worse? . . . by assuming that Stalin meant what he said.” That, essentially, was Roosevelt's game plan. Tehran would give him his first opportunity to see and be seen by Stalin, to discover whether a personal encounter with the dictator might yield results. His eagerness to talk about American politics and the votes of millions of Polish-Americans in his final private session with Stalin there has to be viewed in that context. On one level, Roosevelt the politician was going out on a limb to protect his domestic flanks, preserve his options. On another, the opportunist, by making a show of his own frankness, his willingness to trust, was inviting a modicum of candor, or at least flexibility, on Stalin's part, implicitly asking him to be helpful by appearing, at least, to recognize Polish aspirations. At the same time, he was withholding his formal agreement on the frontier question—finding a plausible excuse to continue stalling—knowing that Soviet forces would inevitably occupy Poland whatever he said, hoping that when that happened, he might retain some bargaining power. It had been his position for the better part of two years that territorial issues should not be settled in private by the big powers, that such negotiations should await the war's end. “Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at,” had been the first of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. Wilson didn't live up to his own standard, though he tried. Roosevelt, more of a realist and more coldhearted in such matters, already knew, as he was signaling to Stalin, that he might have to bend his principles. For him, it was a question of how much, when, and what he could hope to extract in return. In all these ways, the visionary was trying to circumvent the apparent contradictions in his rosy vision of postwar collaboration: finessing and postponing the Polish question at a time when American forces had earned little more than a foothold on the European continent in the five months following the invasion of Sicily, he seemed to be calculating that this was no time to press territorial issues on the Russians, who had been waiting a year and a half for the invasion across the English Channel that would open the “second front.” Roosevelt had first promised a landing in northwest Europe by the end of 1942 to draw away German reinforcements from the east; by the end of 1943, the promised invasion was still half a year away, at best. Until it happened, the imbalance between the Russian effort and sacrifices and those of its allies would remain huge. It was no time to expect a figure as hard-bitten as Joseph Stalin to embrace the high-sounding promises in the Atlantic Charter and the Declaration of the United Nations—documents that had set out noble goals like freedom, independence, and self-determination for the Allies without attempting to say how these would be secured. Roosevelt himself had enumerated the Four Freedoms (of speech and religion, from fear and want) as an inspirational standard for the wartime alliance for which he'd found the name, United Nations; his hope was that it could evolve into a new world order. But he'd left the drafting of blueprints for an international organization to replace the discredited League of Nations to State Department study groups, which he then held at a distance. Determined to prove himself a realist, to avoid Wilson's self-defeating fidelity to paper accords, he focused on power, on how a hard-won peace could be maintained, by force when necessary. So in his private musings, he dwelled more on what he called “the Four Policemen” than the Four Freedoms. These would be the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. Together they'd find a way to intervene swiftly if the peace were threatened; a threat, when they imagined it, that would most likely come from a revanchist Germany or Japan. (Neither Churchill nor Stalin saw the point of including an enfeebled, half-occupied, riven China, but, with some foresight as we can now appreciate, Roosevelt insisted. China would serve as a symbolic marker for the future; the world he imagined would not forever be dominated by whites.) The old league had proved toothless throughout the 1930s in the face of Japanese, German, and Italian aggression and flaunting of accords. In his view, before there could be agreement on a brand-new, more flexible international organization to supplant it, there needed to be agreement on how the policemen would swoop down to thwart aggression and secure the peace. It was the right question but begged the obvious next one: What would keep the powers from falling into conflict among themselves? The president's answer, no less dreamy in its

way than Wilson's, seemed to amount to this: the trust he'd establish between himself and Stalin, in the context of the urgent problems a victorious but suffering and exhausted Soviet Union would be sure to face when the fighting stopped. In the midst of a hot war, he was dimly anticipating the future, trying to head off a cold war, a conflict no one had yet named and few had foreseen. His policy making was so personal and intuitive, so seemingly off the cuff, that it's seldom reflected in documents. Its purest bureaucratic expression can be found in the files of the President's Soviet Protocol Committee, a wartime creation that Harry Hopkins, among all his other roles, chaired, which suggests that its guidelines came directly from the president. Roo-se-velt's alter ego had been living since 1940 in what was then called the Lincoln -Study—later renamed, after redecorating, the Lincoln -Bedroom—two doors down from the president's upstairs study. Most evenings found the two men together, talking politics and policies. When Hopkins married his third wife in 1942 in a White House ceremony, with Roo-se-velt as best man, the new Mrs. Hopkins, a former Paris editor of Harper's Bazaar named Louise Macy, simply moved in upstairs into a suite that had been created for the newlyweds on Roo-se-velt's orders. The Soviet Protocol Committee, an offshoot of -Lend--Lease, which Hopkins also oversaw, was administered by a major general, J. H. Burns. "Russia is so necessary to victory and peace," Burns wrote in a memo to Hopkins three months before the president left for Tehran, "that we must give her maximum assistance and make every effort to develop and maintain the most friendly relations with her." This was a "national policy" set by the president, he argued, yet a number of officials in regular contact with the Russians resisted it. They "do not trust Russia." (In a supplementary memo, written in longhand on the same day, Burns gave a detailed account of "vicious" infighting among Americans in Moscow. Accusations of homosexuality were being cast against the officer most in line with the supposed policy, Philip Faymonville, a brigadier general; it was assumed he was being blackmailed. The time had come, Burns advised, to "clean house of all who are not loyally carrying out the President's policies.") "Policy making" is probably the wrong term for what Roo-se-velt was -really about. "Policy improvisation" might be better; he was feeling his way, setting the stage. The drift of his maneuvers and hopes can be traced in an article in the magazine *The Saturday Evening Post* in April 1943, half a year before his journey to Tehran. The article, titled "Roo-se-velt's World Blueprint," offered an oracular, which is to say less than clear, vision based on a couple of exclusive conversations a staff writer named Forrest Davis had with a personage who could be identified as "the highest authority" but neither quoted nor named. The president, it was subsequently revealed, had read the article and approved it before publication. Its gist was that Roo-se-velt, "no Utopian," had the future of the world well in hand. "The President holds that a genuine association of interest on the part of the great powers must precede the transformation of the united nations military alliance into a political society of nations." Even then, such an organization would be "less ambitious and constraining" than the old league. His own approach, the oracle was apparently pleased to read, "follows more closely the path of his distant cousin, Theodore, than of Woodrow Wilson" (or, so the article also hinted, his guileless vice president, Henry Wallace, who'd recently been dreaming out loud about a global New Deal in the coming "Century of the Common Man").