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Could Roosevelt Have Ended World War II Earlier?

By GEORGE FOWLER

Amid the saturation of World War II 40th anniversary milestone stories and recollections, reference will probably not be made elsewhere to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's failure to foster a German anti-Hitler plot. The President totally shunned a prime possibility of ending hostilities in the West, thereby sharply abbreviating that tragic conflict to the world's great advantage.

Pre-Pearl Harbor America was vehemently divided over FDR's campaign to get the U.S. into that war. But once we were in, for better or worse, the President of the United States had a paramount obligation: winning it in our long-range interests as quickly and mercifully as possible. Few realize the virtual Godsend Roosevelt spurned in this respect, without the barest exploratory consideration.

Distinction Between People And Anti-Nazi Leaders

Throughout 40 years of the Cold War, anti-Communists have always made a distinction between the peoples of Russia and their Kremlin masters; the peoples of the Captive Nations and the Red puppet regimes controlling them. But Roosevelt, particularly after the blackening of the Axis military-strategic situation as 1943 dawned, never attempted to shorten the war by separating the German people and the impressive host of anti-Nazi and non-Nazi Wehrmacht leaders from the Hitler regime.

That isn't to say both the civilian and military centers of non-Nazi influence weren't, by early 1943, beginning to fully reap what they had sown. The professional officer corps had sworn personal allegiance to the Fuhrer rather than to their nation in exchange for Hitler's promise (soon after becoming chancellor) to bring Germany up to

military par with its powerful neighbors. And the great majority of the German people (granting their tremendous emotional indebtedness to him for bringing their sadistically tortured country out of bondage) sheepishly followed an obvious disaster in the making.

By early 1943 even Josef Goebbels' propaganda ministrations couldn't mask the oncoming enormity of the Stalingrad encirclement. Had the U.S. and British governments been so disposed, this period presented the first major time-frame where an approach to anti-Hitlerites in Germany could have been initiated. In *Through the Looking Glass*, a recounting of British Intelligence activities by a former top MI6 operative, this crucial point was made: The British Intelligence services considered Stalingrad as the start of the Cold War, when Soviet expansion aims

should have been a priority consideration of Western Allied planning. Instead, meeting with Winston Churchill at Casablanca, FDR helped slam the door on this option.

The January 1943 Casablanca conference was held some two months after the American invasion of North Africa and it dealt largely with the upcoming Sicily-Italy campaign. At a press conference toward its end, Roosevelt stated that the allies would accept only the "unconditional surrender" of the Axis powers. Whether the President made this statement for dramatic effect without any reflection, or whether it was calculated in cahoots with some of his leftist advisers, history may never know.

Of it, premium New Deal diplomat and then-former Ambassador to Moscow Charles P. "Chip" Bohlen wrote: "Responsibility for this unconditional surrender doctrine rests almost exclusively with President Roosevelt. He announced it... ostensibly because there was nothing that he and Churchill had to tell the press of any particular interest. According to Churchill, he was surprised at the announcement."

'It's Just the Thing for the Russians'

FDR's son Elliott, present at Casablanca, quoted his father as saying: "Of course, it's just the thing for the Russians. 'Unconditional surrender.' Uncle Joe might have made it up himself." Longtime New York Times correspondent and military analyst Drew Middleton wrote in *Retreat from Victory* that Churchill told him years later: "I was startled by the announcement. I tried to hide my surprise. But I was his ardent lieutenant."

Middleton wrote: "The President's apologists have argued that the statement was necessary to convince the Russians of the good faith of the American and British governments and their determination to continue the war against Hitler to complete victory... had not the Americans and the British proved their good faith and

determination at Guadalcanal and Alamein?"

Interestingly, the "show of good faith" toward Stalin rationalization was also used to justify the February 1945 massive bombing of Dresden. And what more "good faith" did the wily Stalin need than the knowledge that FDR and his friends were calling the wartime shots? He certainly knew Robert A. Taft wasn't in the White House with Burton K. Wheeler as his secretary of state.

Indeed, there was another way, with exceptional chance of success, of getting rid of Hitler and his slimy cohorts while ending the war in the West well before D-Day. One of the most remarkable stories of tragic unfulfillment to come out of World War II was published in HUMAN EVENTS in 1960.* Readers requested a record number of reprints, but it is virtually unknown to all but the most history-conscious Americans.

* "Roosevelt's Fatal Error," by George H. Earle, HUMAN EVENTS, March 24, 1960.

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Shortly before Christmas 1959, this reporter traveled from Washington's Union Station to the wealthy Philadelphia suburb of Radnor to meet with former Pennsylvania Gov. George H. Earle. In early January 1943, just before leaving for Casablanca, Roosevelt appointed Earle U.S. naval attache at Istanbul, Turkey. Istanbul, operating grounds of the fabled World War II spy "Cicero," was one of the major neutral cities where the flags of the opposing powers flew on the same blocks. International intrigue and wheeling-dealing were rampant.

Time to Begin Nazi Overthrow Negotiations

Prior to Casablanca, highest-ranking British intelligence operatives had considered the post-North American invasion period an excellent time to begin Nazi-overthrow negotiations with German intelligence chief Wilhelm Canaris, whose true sympathies were known to them.

Head British spy Gen. Stewart Menzies submitted the proposal to the Foreign Office, where it was promptly turned down, "for fear of offending Russia," as Menzies commented after the war. Subsequently, SIS Chief of Air Intelligence and Menzies confidante Frederick Winterbotham wrote: "...but why we should fall over backwards to appease those who were, and are, pledged to destroy our way of life I shall never understand." Statements by then-Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden make it clear he neither wanted nor had instructions to pursue a negotiated peace based on a Hitler gang overthrow. And "ardent lieutenant" Churchill may have been lying or (as Harry Truman so often did) recalling historic moments differently than they actually occurred.

German contact with Earle, referred to in *Der Spiegel* correspondent Heinz Hohne's biography *Canaris* as "an archconservative who yearned to end the ill-starred conflict between the non-Communist powers," was set in motion by Capt. Paul Leverkuehn. He headed the German War Organization Suboffice in Istanbul and before the war had been an internationally known lawyer who listed OSS spy chief William J. Donovan among his acquaintances. In fact Donovan, who had been FDR's "ardent lieutenant" in working for U.S. entry into the war, had made anti-Nazi German connections in Spain but was ordered to break them off.

Suggestion Made To Approach Earle

Leverkuehn suggested that Baron Kurt von Lersner, who headed a German cultural group in Turkey, approach Earle. Lersner had headed the German delegation during the Versailles Peace Conference after World War I, but had been given an inconsequential wartime post due to a fraction of Jewish blood. After an initial positive meeting, Earle agreed to meet with Canaris.

A few days later a short, middle-aged man in civilian clothes showed up at Earle's hotel room. The former governor and the German intelligence chief talked, and Canaris expressed his deep concern over Roosevelt's recent unconditional surrender declaration. He said it would play into Soviet hands and boded ill for all the Western nations. Canaris pointed out that the statement left the highly placed anti-Nazi movement in Germany virtually no bargaining power. He said it meant war to the bitter end, with the Soviet Union emerging as the dominating influence in Europe.

Canaris, Earle Discuss Surrender Terms

George Earle agreed with the German intelligence chief that FDR's stated policy contained disastrous implications. Sensing Canaris had cards to play, he asked what he had in mind. Canaris asked Earle whether he thought Roosevelt really meant "unconditional" surrender. He said Germany's generals, central to any anti-Hitler move, could never swallow such a policy.

"What terms would they consider?" Earle asked.

"Perhaps you will take the matter up with your President," Canaris suggested. "I am leaving Istanbul this afternoon. I will return in 60 days. I hope you will have something to tell me." Canaris had been vague, but Earle considered it an important feeler from one of the key figures in the German government. Earle sent Roosevelt a detailed dispatch in the next diplomatic pouch to Washington, but received no reply from the President.

In March 1943, an attempt on Hitler's life failed on a return flight to his headquarters from the Eastern Front. An acid-timed pencil bomb hidden in a gift package of cognac froze when Hitler's pilot went to a high altitude to avoid turbulence.

That month Earle's phone rang and he heard Canaris' voice: "I'm the gentleman who called on you unannounced two months ago. Has there been any progress regarding the matter we discussed?" Earle thought of his urgent message to FDR, then replied, "No, no progress."

Subsequently Earle arranged to meet with von Lersner at a spot five miles outside Istanbul. Von Lersner capped a three-hour meeting by posing the question: If the anti-Nazi leaders succeeded in either killing or incarcerating Hitler and his top functionaries, could an honorable surrender be arranged? It would be with the understanding that a provisional democratic government be set up in Berlin and military cooperation with the Western allies be arranged in order to keep the Soviet armies out of Europe.

Earle again made coded contact with the White House, pleading with Roosevelt to look into what these anti-Nazis had to offer. He wrote that "as the weeks passed [with no reply to this second appeal] the Red Army continued to grind its way westward, feeding itself on the tools of war Roosevelt's Lend Lease program provided. I continually pressed the matter with hopeless communiques, until I sensed the real snag; von Lersner and his anti-Nazi countrymen had taken an absolute stand against Communist expansion, and this was disturbing to FDR — a man who had great faith in the integrity of Stalin. During the late spring and early summer of 1943 von Lersner kept after me, but still no word of encouragement was heard from Washington."

Plot Included Top Military Leaders

In late summer 1943 von Lersner outlined a specific plan. In addition to many top military and civilian leaders a plot was being readied that included Count von Helldorf, the Berlin chief of police and Freiherr von Boeslager, whose brigade was prepared to surround and take Hitler's East Prussian Wolfchanze (Wolf's Lair) headquarters. In Berlin Gen. von Beck, one of the highest-ranking army officers, was prepared to seize command and begin moving troops to the eastern front once a western cease-fire had been arranged.

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Plotters held key positions in Paris and other strategic locations.

Canaris had sent Count von Moltke to Istanbul in June, where Moltke contacted two OSS-connected professors. He suggested arrangements for a German General Staff officer to travel to England to prepare arrangements with the U.S. and British to open up the German western front.

In speaking with the OSS-academics, Moltke echoed the necessity of retracting FDR's Casablanca declaration. This particular overture drew the personal attention of OSS chief Donovan. Donovan got Leverkuehn to sign a paper (typed on official paper from the German Embassy in Ankara) promising on behalf of the Hitler opposition that German commanders would offer no opposition if the Western allies invaded France. Donovan's interest was so strong that he decided to try Roosevelt again, but to no avail.

Spanish-British Liaison Important to Plotters

The plotters attempted Allied contacts through several countries, such as neutral Sweden. But they considered a highest-levels Spanish-British liaison of high potential import.

Canaris had been told by intermediaries that Francisco Franco, whose admiration for Hitler had waned steadily since the Wehrmacht's considerable assistance during the Spanish Civil War, would be most willing to help. Following World War II, Jose Maria Doussinague, director general of the Spanish Foreign Office, wrote: "To us, the war's solution had always meant an acceptance of our view that the National Socialist regime should be overthrown without, however, destroying Germany. And [the anti-Nazis] had brought us proof that this was not only feasible but comparatively simple."

The conspiratorial plot, unknown to Hitler and ignored by Roosevelt, was boiling ever more rapidly. The only ingredient necessary to virtually assure success was Western allied approval. And as both head coach and quarterback, it was clearly FDR's call to make.

Again Earle appealed to the Presi-

dent. All the Germans asked was Roosevelt's signature on a document agreeing to their basic plan. To guarantee that this all-important paperwork got through, Earle sent it by both Army and Navy channels as well as the regular State Department diplomatic pouch. If Roosevelt agreed, Earle was to be flown to Germany to initiate preliminary terms with Hitler's enemies.

After many days passed Gov. Earle finally received a reply from the President: "All such applications for a negotiated peace should be referred to the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower." Of this Earle said: "Although phrased in diplomatic terms, this was an absolute brush-off. Here was clear-cut indication that the President had no interest in a valid plan laid by desperate but honest men to end the war and save countless lives."

Hitler's onetime role model and subsequent junior sidekick, Benito Mussolini, may have hit on the obstinance of the Washington-London governments. Just before being deposed in 1943 Il Duce mused: "It's easy for [his inner council] to talk of peace. If it were only me I'd leave, even right away. But don't they understand that Churchill and Roosevelt don't want my departure, but the suppression of Italy as a Mediterranean power?"

Two Previous Attempts On Hitler Called Off

Of course, the final desperate attempt against Hitler's life was an 11th-hour snafu. In the summer of 1944 two attempts were called off (because the plotters wanted to get Himmler and Goering with the same bomb) and one was cancelled because the Fuhrer left a meeting unexpectedly.

On July 20 at the Wolf's Lair, Count von Stauffenberg (a highly decorated Russian front veteran who had lost an arm and an eye) attended a Hitler conference with an English-made delayed action bomb in his briefcase. Stauffenberg gave his report and, at about 1 p.m. left the room, his briefcase under a table near Hitler.

After Stauffenberg departed Hitler left his position near the bomb and

walked to a wall map across the room. And someone unwittingly placed the briefcase behind a heavy stand of the table, away from Hitler. To top off the bad luck, the conference site had been changed from a concrete bunker under repair to a small wooden building. This factor minimized the concussion effect when the device exploded.

False Report That Hitler Was Killed

The tremendous blast killed four and wounded Hitler in one arm. An erroneous report was almost instantly relayed to the Berlin plotters: Hitler is dead, proceed with the takeover. Within a few hours Hitler was on the radio telling of the "treachery" of "a clique of ambitious and criminal officers" and calling the failed attempt a sign from providence that he had been spared to fulfill his twisted mission.

Nazi retribution was swift and incredibly ugly. Some 7,000 military and civilian figures were rounded up and 5,000 were executed. Von Stauffenberg's relatives throughout Germany were thrown in concentration camps, where some died. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the famed "Desert Fox" and an outer-rim participant, was given his choice of suicide and a state funeral (death attributed to war wounds) or a court martial and very unhappy consequences for his wife and son. Canaris, not a part of the final plot because he felt Hitler and Co. should be imprisoned and subsequently tried by the Allies, was hanged from a meat-hook.

Thus the aborted coup came a year or so later and in much more haphazard manner than would have been the case had Western allied cooperation been forthcoming.

The Nazis proceeded to dig in for the awful nine and a half months to come. They lifted the longtime ban on political activity in the armed forces and every general staff officer was to be a "National Socialist-officer-leader."

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The party also demanded the Nazi salute rather than the conventional military salute from all officers. And the German people, with the dread "unconditional surrender" hanging over them, fought on.

In a March 1985 column the respected John Chamberlain noted that we've never gotten the true story of the Roosevelt circle's war aims in Europe: why American and British armies were held back from a dash to take Berlin during the months following the attempt on Hitler's life.

Chamberlain wrote that "What we really need is an exposure of the agreements made well before the end of World War II which set specific limits to the eastward sweep of the Eisenhower and Montgomery armies." Actually, it was the Patton and Montgomery armies, Eisenhower being Supreme Allied Commander, carrying out the strategic design of FDR through the President's political operator in uniform, Chief of Staff George C. Marshall.

Allied Forces Could Have Taken Berlin

Drew Middleton wrote in *Retreat from Victory* that both Patton and the previously cautious Montgomery were confident they could drive their armies to and beyond Berlin, split the Reich and end the war. He noted that in subsequent years all of the many German commanders and military experts he had spoken with concurred that either thrust would have succeeded.

Middleton concluded: "The advantage to the Western allies of victory in 1944 rather than in 1945, as a result of a successful offensive by Montgomery or Patton, are obvious today. They certainly were obvious to a great many soldiers and politicians, Americans as well as British, in 1944. But not to Eisenhower." Thus another mystery. To what extent, if at all, was Ike's wretched strategy of a slow advance along a broad front, against a depleted German army with virtually no air sup-

port and terrible logistical problems, his own? He tried to rationalize it as such in *Crusade in Europe*.

But almost certainly the call was from the Roosevelt inner circle to Marshall to Eisenhower. Ike ordered the frustrated field commanders to slow down and meet the advancing Soviets at the Elbe River, in the heart of Germany. But in a 1943 book by Roosevelt's under secretary of state, Sumner Welles — in effect secretary of state, as Secretary Cordell Hull bitterly realized — there is a map showing the intended borders of postwar Germany. And these 1943 drawn borders, largely along the Elbe, became almost exactly the East-West zones of occupation, and subsequently the borders of East and West Germany!

Allied—Not Russian—Troops in Berlin

As Middleton noted: "The war [could] have ended with allied, not Russian, troops in Berlin and East Germany. Allied troops would have occupied Austria and Czechoslovakia. The United States and Britain would have entered the postwar period in a far stronger bargaining position. Who knows how far Russia would have gone in suppressing democracy in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had the allies dominated all of Germany?" And, had Roosevelt but cooperated with George Earle and Canaris, we might have been in an even better position than Middleton visualized.

In a 1984 HUMAN EVENTS interview with Sen. Barry Goldwater, that splendid and candid patriot said of our precarious postwar situation: "Roosevelt's unconditional surrender had a lot to do with creating this situation. That war went on two years more than it should have, and the Soviet empire emerged from it." And so, as liberals and leftists complain about the tremendous current defense responsibilities of this nation, let them ponder in any moments of intellectual honesty the degree to which their crowd heaped it all upon us. ■

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