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Churchill and Obama: Leveraging Strategic Communication to Accomplish Grand Strategy

by

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Introduction

During periods of national and global crises, both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Barack Obama have demonstrated a clear mastery of leveraging strategic communication to inspire people. Given the benefit of hindsight, we realize that Churchill went a step further, successfully using his ability to connect with people to facilitate the accomplishment of his grand strategy. We cannot yet ascertain to what degree President Obama will be successful on this account. However, we can already see similarities between the manner and the purposes for which Churchill and Obama used their unique verbal abilities.

Churchill used strategic communication to rally his domestic constituency, to articulate values and to build strong partnerships as a means to win World War II. Obama is clearly following Churchill's lead in each of these areas. As a relative neophyte on the national stage, he garnered a wave of domestic support for "change we can believe in" and rode it to a sweeping electoral win. His decisions to close Guantánamo Bay and to end policies that some view as torture are ways in which Obama has emphasized national values, similar to Churchill's focus on freedom and perseverance. Obama's diplomatic overtures also already resemble those of Churchill. Like Churchill's persistent yet patient wooing of the Americans to join the Allied cause during World War II, Obama has employed a humble yet concerted effort to renew strong ties with Russia, to realize a world without nuclear weapons and to court Europe through his initial presidential visits and through his choice of Prague as the site for a key policy speech.

This paper focuses on Churchill's use of strategic communication to accomplish his grand strategy of winning the war and creating a new world order based on peace and freedom. In the process he influenced the fate of his nation and the world. Despite critics who would dismiss Obama's strategic communication as "all talk" and call for substance to follow speech, Churchill's leadership of Britain during World War II serves as an important reminder of the impact of a gifted orator in shaping destiny.

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Churchill, His Speeches and World War II

Churchill spoke to inspire people and influence policy. Never was this truer than during his first tenure as Prime Minister, as World War II afforded him a unique opportunity to shape history. A study of his speeches during the war years reveals that he used them to inspire the British people, garner domestic support, reinforce the national character of the British and Allied people and conduct diplomacy. His masterful speeches influenced the course of history and reflected the grand strategy he navigated throughout World War II.

Especially in the darkest of days, his speeches reflected his strength of character and his understanding that timely words aptly spoken can lift a nation's morale and direct its energies. Churchill used every situation, whether beneficial or disadvantageous to the British and Allied cause, as an opportunity to reiterate his belief in the rightness of their actions. He likewise continually reaffirmed his belief in the ability, first of the British people, and later of their Allies (primarily the Soviets and the Americans), to meet the challenges posed by the Axis Powers. He repeatedly reaffirmed his belief that the final outcome would result in Allied victory.

Military victory was his intermediate goal¹ en route to a new political order in which freedom, peace and economic progress reigned. He had no desire for territorial gain or revenge. He held no grudge against the German people—it was Adolf Hitler and the tyranny of Nazism that Churchill so despised. He made this clear in no uncertain terms, even before becoming Prime Minister.² In fact, Churchill realized that the vengeful, overzealous attempt to subjugate Germany following The Great War (later known as World War I) was largely responsible for the reemergence of their extreme nationalism.³ Hitler's appeal to the German people lay in their desire to reestablish themselves as a strong nation. Hitler provided charismatic leadership that Germans could follow, leadership that provided national pride and a strong Germanic identity. The problem was that it came at the expense of human freedom and the sovereignty of other European nations.

A proper study of Churchill's response to this danger first requires an accurate understanding of what grand strategy is, and what it is not. One must also realize that the terrors of Nazi expansion were so encompassing that they required a grand strategy to address them. Hitler and Nazi Germany would not be defeated in a single battle or even during a short campaign, nor would the current state of British military readiness be sufficient for the duration of the war. Germany's progressive rearmament during the interwar period and its industrial machine had maneuvered it into a position of relative strength compared both to its neighbors on the continent and when measured against the British. Before studying the grand strategy Churchill devised to defeat Germany's superior force and secure a lasting peace for Europeans, let us begin by defining our terms.

Grand Strategy Defined

Grand strategy is the matching of means to accomplish strategic, national ends. It is not merely the use of military force to win a war; rather, it is the use of all elements of national power to achieve a nation's various goals. Thus, grand strategy involves the application of economic, diplomatic and political means, in addition to military might, to accomplish a country's objectives. The objectives may involve territorial expansion, a growing economy or a prestigious international reputation. In Churchill's case, they involved freedom, democratic governance and peace. Military victory was actually a means to an end; Churchill rightly saw it as the prerequisite for preserving freedom for the British people and reestablishing it for those on continental Europe.

Many definitions exist that highlight various nuances of balancing means to accomplish ends, and a look at a couple used by notable scholars in the field is insightful. Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart's definition is particularly useful:

Grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources—for to foster the people's willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power. Grand strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the several services, and between the services and industry. Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy—which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will. . . . It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace—for its security and prosperity.⁴

Liddell Hart affirms the idea that grand strategy involves marshalling resources of all kinds to bring pressure against one's foes to win a war. His keen insight regarding the importance of the "people's willing spirit" is appropriate to a study of Churchill's grand strategy. Regardless of his audience, this theme, more than any other, dominates the Prime Minister's speeches during World War II. Churchill's mention of the indomitable spirit of the British people, or that of the English-speaking peoples, always had a dual purpose. One was to communicate appreciation for the people and for their hard, brilliant work which was contributing to the British cause. The other was to reinforce that spirit and spur his citizens on to even greater feats. Winston Churchill clearly believed that the British people formed the center of gravity—that is, the pivotal point of their war effort. British success depended on the willingness of the people to fight instead of succumbing to German attacks. Thus, Churchill continually emphasized the centrality of maintaining the highest levels of morale no matter the sacrifice and hardship that befell them.

Liddell Hart's definition is fitting in another way as well, especially in light of the importance Churchill placed on the postwar environment. While demanding unconditional surrender of his enemies, Churchill considered it of utmost importance to avoid the mistakes of the Treaty of Versailles. He was intent on setting conditions that would ensure a prosperous, peaceful and free Europe.⁵ Although Liddell Hart's definition is oriented primarily toward winning wars, he also indicates that a high priority should be given to the peace that will follow the war. Grand strategy does, indeed, apply to both wartime and peacetime. Successful countries apply coordinated grand strategies during peace and war to further their national interests. The focus of this paper is on Churchill's leadership of England during the early years of World War II, starting before the Americans and the Soviets entered the war and continuing onward to the adoption of the "Europe First" priority. It therefore deals with Churchill's leadership of British grand strategy only during war.

In addition, however, it briefly explores the Prime Minister's plan for peace following the war, in line with Liddell Hart's definition. Furthermore, the primary historical question this paper addresses is how Churchill's speeches reflect his grand strategy. Thus, the speeches Churchill makes during this timeframe serve as the main subject material. Liddell Hart's definition, with a few supplements highlighted below, comprises the lens through which Churchill's speeches are analyzed and his grand strategy assessed. Before delving into Churchill's grand strategy, Correlli Barnett provides a few insights on grand strategy that are worth noting.

Grand strategy necessitates national power. Without national power, grand strategies will not be effective. National power, in turn, requires resources. As Liddell Hart mentioned, resources can be of an economic, political or moral nature. Barnett agrees with this in his explanation of national power, but also reminds us that power can be measured in both absolute and relative terms:

The power of a nation-state by no means consists only in its armed forces, but also in its economic and technological resources; in the dexterity, foresight and resolution with which its foreign policy is conducted; in the efficiency of its social and political organization. It consists

most of all in the nation itself, the people; their skills, energy, ambition, discipline, initiative; their beliefs, myths and illusions. And it consists, further, in the way all these factors are related to one another. Moreover, national power has to be considered not only in itself, in its absolute extent, but relative to the state's foreign or imperial obligations; it has to be considered relative to the power of other states.⁶

Barnett's emphasis on people as a significant resource is critical. It is not only the military manpower that is important, but those involved in industry on the domestic front as well. Without the proper armament and equipment, and the timely provision of it along lines of communication and supply, the mobilization and sustainment of a formidable army is impossible. Barnett's definition of the elements comprising national power rightly points out that a higher level of people's skills, social organization, technology, will and initiative equates to a more powerful nation. But as he also indicates, there are two types of power: absolute and relative. A nation will have greater absolute power when it has a greater level of resources (or means) at its disposal for use in accomplishing its goals (ends). Greater absolute power does not necessarily equate to greater relative power, however. Relative power depends upon the country's power in comparison to that of other nation-states. Relative power, therefore, is more critical and was Churchill's prime concern.

Domestic Success

Before exploring the means by which Churchill increased England's relative power and accomplished his ends, a short look at the effectiveness of Churchill's speeches on the domestic front is instructive. He rallied the British people during some very dark days, beginning in the early stages of the war. Following France's collapse and before the Soviet Union's and America's entrance into World War II on the Allied side (discussed in some detail later in this paper), the British people were alone in their stand against the Germans.⁷ This made the need for Churchill's strong leadership and inspiration of the British people all the more critical. Maximizing British national power and withstanding the German onslaught meant mobilizing "the nation itself, the people; their skills, energy, ambition, discipline, initiative; their beliefs, myths and illusions."⁸ Churchill rallied his people in spades. Four days into the Battle of Britain, he assured them that their contribution, though not always recognized, would not be in vain.

This is no war of chieftains or of princes, of dynasties or national ambition; it is a war of peoples and of causes. There are vast numbers . . . who will render faithful service in this war, but whose names will never be known, whose deeds will never be recorded. This is a War of the Unknown Warriors; but let all strive without failing in faith or in duty, and the dark curse of Hitler will be lifted from our age.⁹

Thus, Churchill urged faithful service by reminding the people of the cause before them and the accompanying need for action. A month later, Churchill did recognize the immense contributions of a particular group of people in the service of their country. In some of his most immortalized words, the Prime Minister applauded British airmen for their gallant efforts against the Germans by reminding the rest of Britons that "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."¹⁰ Another month later, Churchill reminded his fellow citizens what a mistake Hitler had made in his judgment of the British people: "Little does he know the spirit of the British nation, or the tough fibre of the Londoners . . . who have been bred to value freedom far above their lives."¹¹ Elsewhere the Prime Minister spurred his countrymen on to extraordinary feats through similar words of inspiration: "Neither by material damage nor by slaughter will the people of the British Empire be turned from their solemn and inexorable purpose. . . . On every side, there is the cry, 'We can take it,' but with it, there is also the cry, 'Give it 'em back.'"¹²

As demonstrated in these examples, Churchill used every opportunity to reinforce what he believed to be the true character and fortitude of the British people. He included an inspirational segment in every

speech. While these differed slightly from one talk to another, their theme was always the same: Our purpose is just and our people are up to the task. In fact, rallying the British people throughout the war was one of the foundational means by which Churchill sought to accomplish his ends: victory for the Allies and freedom, self-determination and economic growth for all Europeans.

Following the lonely early days of the war and of the Battle of Britain—and partially because of them—relative power became Churchill's predominant concern. He realized that the important thing was for the British to be stronger than their enemies. Even before assuming the role of Prime Minister in May 1940, Churchill outlined how Neville Chamberlain's strategy of appeasement toward Hitler had left Britain exposed and ill ready to meet the challenges posed by Hitler's unquenchable appetite for military conquest:

It is the most grievous consequence which we have yet experienced of what we have done and of what we have left undone in the last five years—five years of futile good intention, five years of eager search started for the line of least resistance, five years of uninterrupted retreat of British power, five years of neglect of our air defences. . . . We have been reduced from a position of safety and power—power to do good, power to be generous to a beaten foe, power to make terms with Germany, power to give her proper redress for her grievances, power to stop her arming if we chose, power to take any step in strength or mercy or justice which we thought right—reduced in five years from a position safe and unchallenged to where we stand now.¹³

Churchill's assessment was both accurate and well informed. His experience as the First Lord of the Admiralty during The Great War gave him insight into the relative balance of power. As the First Lord, he kept tallies of British sea power, in terms of the number of battleships and battle-cruisers in the Royal Navy, compared with the number in the German Navy.¹⁴ He also knew the defenses necessary for major conflict. Thus, when he became Prime Minister, he knew all too well that Britain had not entered the war as prepared as it could or should have been.¹⁵

He knew that England would pay the price for her state of ill repair in several ways. It would take time to rebuild her defenses and to enlarge her Army, the Royal Navy (RN) and the Royal Air Forces (RAF). It would take a major shift in her peacetime industry to support wartime requirements. Churchill tackled this as part of his grand strategy, leading an increase in the volume of combat munitions Britain produced (in terms of annual expenditure) that nearly tripled in three years.¹⁶ Due to her lack of preparation, England was also forced to find means of manning, training, equipping and deploying her new forces in a rapid manner, without the luxury afforded by time. This was a luxury that Britain could have enjoyed if the British government had heeded Churchill's advice on the matter. He had seen the handwriting on the wall as early as 1934 and made the lonely argument for preventing another great war by accumulating deterrents against Hitler's aggression.¹⁷ In his "The Lights are Going Out" speech on 16 October 1938, 15 days after Neville Chamberlain's infamous declaration that he had secured "peace in our time," Churchill added to his calls for British armament as a deterrent to Nazi aims. He advocated adding the power of values to the actions of rearming. In a plea to the United States and to his own countrymen, he put it this way:

We must arm. Britain must arm. America must arm. . . . But arms . . . are not sufficient by themselves. We must add to them the power of ideas. People say we ought not to allow ourselves to be drawn into a theoretical antagonism between Nazidom and democracy; but the antagonism is here now. It is this very conflict of spiritual and moral ideas which gives the free countries a great part of their strength. You see these dictators on their pedestals, surrounded by the bayonets of their soldiers and the truncheons of their police . . . they boast and vaunt themselves before the world, yet in their hearts there is unspoken fear. They are afraid of words and thoughts: words spoken abroad, thoughts stirring at home—all the more powerful because forbidden—terrify

them. . . . A state of society where men may not speak their minds, where children denounce their parents to the police, where a businessman or small shopkeeper ruins his competitor by telling tales about his private opinions—such a state of society cannot long endure if brought into contact with the healthy outside world.¹⁸

This suggestion should not have come as a surprise from a statesman accustomed to wielding speech as a weapon of influence. Whether in international or domestic circles, a positive message of freedom holds hope for those suffering from its lack. It likewise inspires those living in freedom to endeavor to offer that same opportunity to those less privileged. Before World War II began, when Churchill saw war as still preventable, he viewed the message of freedom as one means of demonstrating moral fortitude against the tyranny of dictatorial aggression. During war, he saw a moral message as a means of reasserting the rightness of one's cause and of solidifying people's support for necessary but arduous tasks.

In addition to these military and moral failures of preparation, England's situation at the outset of World War II would severely strain her financial coffers. Finally, it would necessitate political alliances that would prove to be slow in developing. Nevertheless, given the situation Churchill inherited, that was precisely where he focused much of his time, energy, and communication. He invested letters and personal visits to President Roosevelt and America, all in effort to secure their outmost assistance and eventual alliance. He likewise immediately declared alliance with the Soviet Union when the fortuitous moment came. Churchill did these things while waging the war and rebuilding the British military and industry. He did them because he knew that the British would not win alone. These steps were vital for victory and part of his grand strategy.

Success Abroad

Churchill's first diplomatic breakthrough came through alliance with the Soviets. Despite Churchill's strong distaste for the Soviet Union,¹⁹ he pursued a pragmatic alliance because he realized its necessity for Britain's survival, victory and future freedom. Churchill declared British alliance with the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the same day that Germany conducted an unprovoked attack against the Soviet western flank, violating the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact. The move was a strategic blunder for Hitler, as the German military did not make the permanent gains he had hoped for on the Eastern front. Meanwhile, British alliance with the Soviet Union proved to be a major turning point in the war, increasing Allied military power and industrial capacity considerably. Churchill recognized, however, that the Soviets' entrance into the war on the Allied side, while a significant step in the right direction, was not sufficient to assure victory.

As a result he continued to doggedly seek assistance from America. Since the early days of his tenure as Prime Minister, Churchill had courted the American President both for war supplies and for American entrance into the war with the British and the French. Churchill's efforts would eventually prove fruitful on both accounts. However, it would involve multiple trips across the Atlantic Ocean, speeches to joint sessions of Congress, and personal letters and visits to President Roosevelt along the way. Even after all this, America's entrance into the war, like that of the Soviets, was due to more than Churchill diplomacy. It was the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor in late 1941 that finally brought America into the war. This event, like the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, would prove to be an ill-fated act by the Axis Powers, but it would serve Churchill's grand strategy well.

The American contribution to the war effort, however, did not begin only after Pearl Harbor. Churchill succeeded in obtaining supplies and naval assistance through trade with America before he received its manpower and the full force of its industrial might. In fact, the United States provided a lifeline of supplies across the Atlantic Ocean and aided the British in the critical Battle for the Atlantic, and President Roosevelt co-signed the Atlantic Charter outlining a common vision for the postwar environment, one

that would be based on self-determination.²⁰ A deeper understanding of Churchill's grand strategy in courting American support warrants a closer look at each of these areas.

A substantial portion of the American supply lifeline came in the form of material support. Churchill secured a regular flow of supplies from the United States, but two major provisions particularly benefited the British: the provision of 50 American destroyers in September 1940 and the Lend-Lease Bill in November 1941. In the first of these transactions, America sent 50 American Navy destroyers in return for an American 99-year lease of certain British bases in the North and South Atlantic. In Lend-Lease, "two successive enactments of about £3,000,000,000 sterling were dedicated to the cause of world freedom."²¹ Lend-Lease saved the British financially and militarily at a time when the British were down to their last one hundred million pounds.²² These financial and military goods proved American intent in truly meeting British needs. They were vital in supporting the Battle of the Atlantic against the German U-boats. Additionally, the destroyers filled the British gap between what they had in their peacetime inventories and those which would be produced by the new wartime construction program under Churchill.²³

The Atlantic Charter represented a second type of American support for the British cause prior to actual entry into World War II—that of moral support. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to the charter on 12 August 1940 during their first meeting. In it they set forth eight points outlining the broad political, economic and social framework that they desired to shape the peace that would follow the Second World War. The charter stated that they sought no territorial aggrandizement for their countries. It upheld the sovereignty of countries and the right of people to choose their own government. It supported the proper treatment of workers, states' pursuit of economic growth and the ability of all nations to trade on equitable terms.²⁴ It also indicated the President's and the Prime Minister's desire that the future world order would be peaceful, that there would be a "permanent system of general security"²⁵ that would occur "after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny."²⁶

Churchill would later pursue this system of collective security through a new international body. He became a proponent for the United Nations Organization (UNO) and championed an international armed force.²⁷ He envisioned the UNO as a replacement for the failed League of Nations, one that would be equipped with teeth and able to enforce its collectively reached decisions.²⁸ Hence, once again the international relations student can observe Churchill's foresight, his ends and the means through which he sought their accomplishment. One can also see how, in accordance with Liddell Hart's definition of grand strategy, Churchill's pursuit of a sustainable peace affected his actions in war. Thus, long before the Allies defeated the Axis powers, Churchill was shaping the environment of the postwar world through his emphasis on setting conditions favorable for a sustainable peace.

One of the lasting impacts of the Atlantic Charter is that of setting self-government as the international norm. It is true that Churchill and the Allies were unable to ensure its application for all nations, particularly those of Eastern Europe. It is also true that there was some angst between the Americans and the British regarding whether the charter applied to the colonial areas under British imperial rule.²⁹ Despite the seemingly incongruent nature of the Atlantic Charter and the perpetuation of the British Dominions, the Atlantic Charter signified the high value that the British and the Americans placed on freedom. Its themes were also later adopted by the United Nations in its heralding of territorial sovereignty, human rights, rule of law and democratic governance. For the short term, the charter was important because President Roosevelt, the head of a neutral state, signed it. This gave Churchill and the British unambiguous American written support for their war aims—even before the United States officially entered World War II.

Once the Soviets and the Americans had finally entered the war on his side, Churchill adapted his grand strategy. He did not change his ends or the broad means by which he sought to accomplish them,

but he did adjust the details. No longer needing to secure full U.S. and Soviet support, Churchill instead focused his influence on the strategic priority as he saw it: Europe must come first. The Allies must all agree to defeat Nazi Germany before turning the weight of their collective resources toward the Pacific and Japan.³⁰ The early assessment was that Germany could remain in the war as a viable enemy independent of Japan, but that the opposite was not true. This decision did not mean that Churchill or the American or Soviet contingents were deceived into overlooking the threat Japan posed. It did recognize that resources were limited and that the Allies' cause was best served by a coherent strategy. Roosevelt and the American Joint Staff agreed to this plan, as demonstrated by their memorandum of April 1942 that outlined a plan for a second front in Europe, complementing the East European front held by the Soviet Army.³¹ Churchill's leadership in this prioritization of effort, men and equipment was an integral part of his ongoing grand strategy. With allies on his side, he now looked beyond purely British means to influence Allied means of accomplishing victory.

Despite these successes, the tide of the war had changed, and Winston Churchill's role would no longer be that of the predominant political figure. He would share that role for the duration of the war with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, as well as with the Soviet premiere, Joseph Stalin. The notable historian Michael Howard nicely summarizes the impact that Churchill had, especially during those early years of the war, and how critical his courtship of American support had been:

It might be argued that Churchill's greatest achievement lay not so much in the leadership he provided for his own countrymen as in the clarity with which he saw, from the very beginning of his Administration, that Britain was now dependent on the United States for her continued survival, and in the patience, the skill, the tenacity and the charm with which he coaxed the American people and their President into underwriting British independence. In so doing the United States assumed the burden of world responsibility which had at last grown too heavy for the United Kingdom to bear.³²

After gaining the added strength necessary for the Allies to be successful by winning American and Soviet partnership, Churchill did not pawn off all responsibility onto his friends. He remained engaged in shaping the political outcome of the war through the joint conferences with the American and Soviet allies while directing the British military, financial and industrial aspects of the war effort. Fast-forwarding a couple of years and following victory in Europe, Churchill realized the task was not yet complete; his ends were not yet achieved. Despite the political cost that he would pay,³³ Churchill firmly believed in the need to support America and the cause of freedom in the Pacific theater. Even in the European theater, freedom and a lasting peace were not inevitable at that point. There was work yet to do. Churchill summarized the situation in May 1945 this way:

On the Continent of Europe we have yet to make sure that the simple and honourable purposes for which we entered the war are not brushed aside or overlooked in the months following our success, and that the words "freedom," "democracy," and "liberation" are not distorted from their true meaning as we have understood them. There would be little use in punishing the Hitlerites for their crimes if law and justice did not rule, and if totalitarian or police governments were to take the place of the German invaders. We seek nothing for ourselves. But we must make sure that those causes which we fought for find recognition at the peace table in facts as well as words, and above all we must labour that the world organization which the United Nations are creating at San Francisco does not become an idle name, does not become a shield for the strong and a mockery for the weak. It is the victors who must search their hearts in their glowing hours, and be worthy by their nobility of the immense forces they wield.³⁴

As evidenced through such inspiring speeches, part of Churchill's greatness lay in his vision of the ends and the means to accomplish them. Another portion lay in his persistent follow-through despite

lonely, difficult days. Churchill demonstrated this trait even after losing high office, as leader of the Opposition in England and through a seminal speech in Fulton, Missouri, where he announced that “an iron curtain has descended across the [European] Continent.”³⁵ In this speech he championed the UNO and suggested that it have an international armed force as a counterbalance to the “iron curtain.” He truly understood and appreciated the responsibility that victory brought, that the elusive peace and the ends he had sought for six years must be maintained. Although the peace had been won by defeat of the Axis Powers, the Soviets now posed a threat that jeopardized the values pronounced in the Atlantic Charter.

Later, in Zurich, Switzerland, Churchill cast the vision a step further. He called on France to partner with Germany in forging a new future that would create a “United States of Europe.”³⁶ Churchill proclaimed that there was no other way for Western Europe to experience recovery and reconciliation—economically and spiritually.

Conclusion and Contemporary Significance

In summary and in Eliot Cohen’s estimation, Churchill was analogous to a painter:

Churchill’s conduct of coalition strategy in World War II reflected this vivid-hued harmony (similar to that of a painter adjusting his work as he goes, yet maintaining the same perspective as when he started). From the first, the main themes—the subject of the picture—were clear, and he never deviated from them: the primacy of the American alliance, the importance of keeping Russia in the war, the task of dismembering the opposing alliance while extending one’s own.³⁷

Like Cohen’s painter, Churchill maintained these themes from the start and throughout the completion of his “painting.” What sets him apart from other great leaders of history is his early discernment of the criteria that were necessary for victory. Before becoming Prime Minister and throughout the long struggles and the victories of the war, his vision of the ends that must be achieved and the surest means by which to achieve them was truly unique. He rallied his citizenry, breathed life into Britain’s war-making industry, secured material and moral support from the tardy Americans—and then built a grand coalition with both them and the Soviets. Churchill used strategic communication to take each of these steps and eventually realize his grand strategy, hoping that future British generations would remember those days as “their finest hour.”³⁸

Returning to a contemporary view, we can ascertain that the context in which Churchill and Obama assumed the mantle of leadership is distinct. While Britain’s survival was in the balance in 1940 when Churchill became the Prime Minister, a person would be hard pressed to assert the same is true of the United States today—despite the array of challenges that currently face our country. Though the circumstances in which President Obama is exercising leadership differ from those that Churchill faced, there are already similarities appearing. The primary similarity is the prominent role played by strategic communication. As effective strategic communication to multiple audiences was essential for Churchill to influence the outcome of World War II, it is central to Obama’s grand strategy of repairing America’s image and influence abroad, winning the current wars and restoring consumer confidence at home. While he has already been selected to receive the Nobel Peace Prize and has been cited for restoring a climate of civility to international politics, only time will tell whether Obama’s use of strategic communication will yield lasting results similar to those produced by Churchill.

Endnotes

- ¹ Winston S. Churchill, “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat,” Speech to the House of Commons, 13 May 1940, in Winston S. Churchill, *Never Give In!: The Best of Winston Churchill’s Speeches: Selected By His Grandson* (New York: Hyperion, 2003), p. 206.
- ² Churchill, “Nazidom . . . with All Its Hatreds and All Its Gleaming Weapons,” Speech to the House of Commons, 24 October 1935; “A Hush Over Europe,” Speech broadcast to the United States from London, 8 August 1939; and “War,” Speech to the House of Commons, 3 September 1939, all in *Never Give In!*, pp. 121–122, 192–194 and 198, respectively.
- ³ Churchill, “The Atlantic Charter,” Speech broadcast in London, 24 August 1941, in *Never Give In!*, p. 301.
- ⁴ Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2d rev. ed. (New York, 1974), p. 353, quoting from Paul M. Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
- ⁵ Churchill, “The Atlantic Charter.”
- ⁶ Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1972), p. xi.
- ⁷ Churchill, “The News From France is Very Bad,” Speech broadcast from London, 17 June 1940, in *Never Give In!*, p. 219.
- ⁸ Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. xi.
- ⁹ Churchill, “The War of the Unknown Warriors,” Speech broadcast from London, 14 July 1940, in *Never Give In!*, p. 236.
- ¹⁰ Churchill, “The Few,” Speech to the House of Commons, 20 August 1940, in *Never Give In!*, p. 238.
- ¹¹ Churchill, “These Cruel, Wanton, Indiscriminate Bombings of London,” Speech broadcast from London, 11 September 1940, in *Never Give In!*, p. 252.
- ¹² Churchill, “We Can Take It!” Speech to the House of Commons, 8 October 1940, in *Never Give In!*, p. 255.
- ¹³ Churchill, “A Total and Unmitigated Defeat,” Speech to the House of Commons, 5 October 1938, in *Never Give In!*, p. 177.
- ¹⁴ Richard Holmes, *In the Footsteps of Churchill* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 98–99 and 107.
- ¹⁵ Churchill, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress,” 26 December 1941, in *Never Give In!*, p. 321.
- ¹⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, “Churchill and Coalition Strategy in World War II,” in Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, p. 51.
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