



Madness to the Method: Franklin D. Roosevelt and planning for Japan During the Second World War

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1. Introduction

Comprehending the foreign strategy and policy arrangements Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President of United States of America who served from 1933 till his death in 1945, is a broadly troublesome undertaking. Roosevelt scarcely gave clear signs of his post-war goals and put forth clashing expressions to his counsellors. Roosevelt was additionally not a specialist on East Asia, and post-war Japan was not at the highest point of his motivation. In any case, Roosevelt considered recognizing objectives for the post-war world amid the war to be “a very valuable thing.”ⁱ

This paper will address the role of the President’s office in planning for post-war Japan by scrutinizing the thoughts and ideas of Roosevelt. The President had clarified in 1942 that he trusted the State Department to give him a basket of plans to which he could resort to locate post-war policies after the end of the Second World War.ⁱⁱ Wartime deliberations on post-war designs were not intended to set a distinct course, but rather to create a definite framework to ease future choices and decisions from Roosevelt’s perspective, after the end of the first world war the victors had no concurred goals in light of the fact that insufficient post-war arrangements had been done. Roosevelt’s novel basket method would be more systematic than the imprudent craziness which resulted in a failed peace after the end of war in 1919.

Roosevelt’s straightforward image of the whole planning progression was convoluted by his very own authoritative style. As I will put forward in this paper, by analyzing the sources of information for Roosevelt and his ideas about Japan, the president made a profound division between the State Department and the White House through his hesitance to seek the counsel or illuminate his officials and counsellors. In the Roosevelt era informal commitments, stereotyped ideas, unpredictable and lopsided discussion with specialists, and contention between and with would-be counsellors tarnished the long-term policy planning processes. Thus, through this paper I would like to challenge the preconceived idea that US planning for the war and for the time period beyond it was totally systematic, coherent and cogent. There was some madness to the method.

2. Personal sources of news and information

Roosevelt’s specific administrative style generated a climate of confusion with regards to the policies. Roosevelt’s association with his official counsels were especially stressed by his caprices. He was considered to be a cynic who distrusted everyone. Roosevelt was rarely honest in his dealings with his official advisers.ⁱⁱⁱ US Ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew in 1940, asked for information on Roosevelt’s disposition on Japanese affairs. Japan, Grew asserted, had marched incessantly on a path of militarism, pursued a war in China to aggrandize territory, and seemed, by all accounts, to be on a course to enter into a conflict with the United States of America. The minister expected to comprehend his president’s perspectives with the goal to create policies for ground realities.^{iv} Roosevelt responded to this rational demand with vague clichés. Roosevelt educated Grew that the complications in front of

them merit thinking which involves the geo-politics of all the continents and oceans of the earth.^v This remark left America's diplomat to Japan with next to nothing in the form of direction from Washington.

Roosevelt's absence of enthusiasm for official proficiency was reinforced by his yearning to discover facts through irregular channels. Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, stated in his diary that Roosevelt's ardent happiness in getting direct news in a sporadic way through irregular channels was an extraordinary blend of decent and awful characteristics. This eagerness kept him busy and provided him with new information. His obsession with getting an insider's perspective made him underestimate and even disregard the kind of complete information which comes from well-established processes through the official channels. Stimson trusted this was a sad propensity which the officials could never cure.^{vi} Officials misused Roosevelt's ad hoc style of policymaking and his curiosity for information supplied by outsiders by sending him various reports and articles, and in addition, making individual pleas thus trying to shape Roosevelt's judgement. While the methodology of gathering bits of facts and figures casually gave the president diverse data on the issues, his judgement was clouded by the procedure. The president was susceptible to fresh ideas introduced by favourites, and his sources came up short on the specific situation and insightfulness given by formal procedures.

With no reasonable channel between Roosevelt and his diplomats at the State Department, he was destined to get verbose field reports from his own emissaries than from positioned consulate authorities. Roosevelt had a propensity for selecting individual ministers when he needed inside news about circumstances in Asia and Europe. He urged the leaders of foreign nations to consider these men as his personal delegates and to converse with them frankly. The existence of informal ambassadors with the command and ear of Roosevelt diluted the power and mission of authorized representatives.^{vii}

Despite the fact that representatives in Asia sent information to Washington, these were expected to go through the head of the division of Far Eastern affairs pen-ultimately to the secretary of state, and from that point onto the president. For a document to get into the hands of Roosevelt through ordinary channels, it was expected to suit the interests of both the secretary of state and the division boss, which was no simple errand. On the other hand, personal agents had an immediate line to Roosevelt who was less fascinated by the official bureaucratic reports. Joseph Grew, later recollected that informing or reporting to the US Government was an arduous task.^{viii} Roosevelt's inclination for sending individual diplomats gave him perceptions from short-term visits abroad, instead of depending on detailed reports from authorities with more involvement in the locale. Thus, his learning of about the nuances of faraway distant nations was based on hearsay and recounted perceptions instead of adept analysis.

Roosevelt's administration of his consultants in Washington brought on additional challenges. The president wanted to choose foreign policy from the basket provided by both his formal and informal advisers. This exercise resulted in tension in the Roosevelt administration. The president's denial to refer to and to team up with his official area specialists resulted in a detachment between his own reasoning and the official planning process. Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, wrote that it was the President who was at the helm of foreign affairs and he could not say what was going on.^{ix} Dean Acheson who was the assistant secretary of state amid the war, later contended that by barring the secretary of state from his detailing of procedure, Roosevelt made a State Department whose policymaking was "theoretical and unreal...absorbed in platonic planning of a utopia."^x On December 2, 1941, amid a discussion with the British minister, Roosevelt put forward that they should all be together in the face of a Japanese attack. Roosevelt rehashed this vow to the diplomat two days after this meeting; however, he never educated the high-ranking officials and ministers and officials of his cabinet that he had committed the nation to participate in the war.^{xi}

Roosevelt's administration of his officials and advisers, with his help of top choices and propensity to play the staff against one another, left authorities baffled and confounded. Roosevelt many a time

eagerly handed down new policies which he passed on as instant choices and tolerated no resentment against them.^{xii} He likewise invigorated contention among his officials. His necessary leadership process frequently comprised of setting up a squabble and afterwards choosing the best course in the wake of hearing the two sides. This exercise often sent the authorities in a state of disarray and frenzy.^{xiii} Roosevelt so favoured Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State to Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, that Welles was generally perceived as the informal secretary until his retirement. Due to such treatment, Hull had offered to resign not once but twice. Hull resented that he and his expertise was constantly looked down upon and foreign policy was decided without informing him, and Roosevelt stood behind his favourite.^{xiv}

In a similar vein, in 1944 Roosevelt, after dining with Henry Morgenthau, all of a sudden embraced his sweeping plan to reduce Germany to an agricultural society after the war. The president was not ready to budge even in the face of vociferous objections raised by his cabinet, and regardless of the way that the plan negated an agreement on post-war Germany which had been created over years of careful planning. Hull thought of this as a denial. Due to Roosevelt's poor management, an associate put forward that the secretary of state was very anxious and had been having sleepless nights.^{xv}

Despite the fact that Roosevelt relinquished the Morgenthau plan as fast as he had received it, Henry Lewis Stimson, the Secretary of War, believed that the event represented the disorderly nature of Roosevelt administration since Roosevelt would effectively put his signature on any document without consulting his other officials or having a look at the pros and cons of the document before him.^{xvi} Later, when Cordell Hull resigned, Roosevelt chose Ed Stettinius as his replacement as Stettinius was irresolute and quite young. Roosevelt educated Stettinius that James Byrnes, a very qualified congressperson, was to be given precedence over Stettinius but he had settled on Stettinius as Byrnes might have questioned Roosevelt's authority in matters of foreign policy. Stettinius consented to take the position, strategically yielding that Roosevelt would have complete powers with regards to foreign policy, but Roosevelt was to keep the State Department better educated of his plans.^{xvii} However, there is little to show that this assurance was respected.

3. Roosevelt's Idea of Japan

Many factors advocate that racial prejudice informed Roosevelt's ideas on Japan. Roosevelt upheld the exclusion act of 1924, which had resulted in a tension between the Japanese and American governments by forbidding Japanese movement. He contended that such limitations were just in light of the fact that Japanese nationals could not acclimatize with white Americans. He wrote that intermingling of Asian blood with American or European blood yields, unfortunate results most of the time. This, he believed was not aimed against the pure Japanese race, whom he believed would feel a similar repulsiveness that he felt at the intermarriage of American and Japanese common people.^{xviii} His writings pointed to a distinction between migrants from Europe, who were regarded to be valuable in renewing American communities, and Asian 'invaders', whose hereditary impact would be harmful to the future American populace.^{xix} This belief that Europeans could be embraced, while Asians could not portrayed the apparent separation in blood and culture among Japanese and Americans. These stereotypes had shaped Roosevelt's thinking for years and manifested in his writings. Later he contended that hostility was in the blood of the Japanese people and leadership.^{xx}

However, Roosevelt's engagements toward Japanese-Americans give a varied perception. Roosevelt thought about the handling of Japanese-Americans amid the Second World War in two unique settings, conscription and imprisonment. Roosevelt in 1936, asked the Chief of operations in Hawaii to prepare a list of Japanese-Americans and Japanese who were to be imprisoned in concentration camps first in case there was trouble.^{xxi} Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Secretary of navy asked Roosevelt to expel people of Japanese origin from the crucial strategic base of Oahu to some other place, where the

Japanese people would be forced to work for themselves and produce their food to sustain themselves. Roosevelt answered in the affirmative and gave scant regard to the constitutional rights of these people.

Neither man alluded to the Americans of Japanese parentage as Americans in this exchange, but in fact, put forward that these Japanese people should be removed and put under supervision.^{xxii} However, Roosevelt had a different opinion regarding the military service of Japanese-Americans. He contended that any devoted American citizen should be permitted to serve his nation because Americanism was something that transcended race and ancestry.^{xxiii} These two cases demonstrate that Roosevelt's management of Japanese-Americans involved practicality instead of morality. Race occupied a central role in Roosevelt's reasoning on Japan. Nonetheless, his handling of Japanese-Americans reflects that racial bigotry was not an overwhelming element instilled in his reasoning; rather, it could be defeated for expediency.

In dishing out liability for Japanese hostility, Roosevelt saw no difference amongst Japanese authority and the general population. An investigation by the Office of War Information (OWI) established that Roosevelt distinguished between German administration and the German individuals around 75 per cent of the time, mentioning "Hitler" and the "Nazis" as the adversary. On the other hand, the president solely mentioned "Japan" all in all when mentioning to the adversary, in 105 of 116 references. Several other noted figures in the US administration, the secretary of state and undersecretary of state, Henry Wallace the then vice president, were adept at distinguishing between the Japanese individuals and military authority, than was Roosevelt.^{xxiv}

Roosevelt, in the summer of 1944, explicitly associated the actions of the Japanese government to the general population. The Japanese can't be believed, he educated a group of journalists, since "whether or not the people of Japan itself know and approve of what their warlords have done for nearly a century, the fact remains that they seem to have been giving hearty approval to the Japanese policy of acquisition of their neighbours and their neighbours' lands and military and economic control of as many other nations as they can get their hands on." Before embracing the Morgenthau plan for Germany, Roosevelt openly expressed that after her defeat Japan must be closed for the world till it proves that her people are "willing and able to live with peaceful nations."^{xxv} The issue of distinguishing commoners from their leadership was critical in taking care of post-war handling of rival nations. "Indiscriminate hatred may be a mighty weapon, but it is likely to be impeding to a satisfactory peace."^{xxvi} Roosevelt's merging of the Japanese individuals and leadership, alongside his doubts about Japanese racial attributes, demonstrate that he might have stood for a hard peace to 'discipline' and control the Japanese populace after the end of the war.

4. Conclusion

It is evident that the policymakers operated in a vacuum, ignorant of official proceedings and international promises which the president made. With no confirmation that the strategies coming out of the bureaucratic procedure would not be dismissed by presidential privilege after the end of the war, policymakers would have felt that they were throwing stones into a lake in the dark. Roosevelt's vigour and health deteriorated quickly during 1944-1945. By 1944, on account of declining health, he had progressed towards becoming a "part-time president."^{xxvii} Roosevelt still contributed on the issues most critical to him; however, this constraint affected every corner of his administration. Even in the case of waning control of Roosevelt, the bureaucratic set up that he had created to control policymaking continued. The line to get policy approved was ambiguous, and Roosevelt's propensity to suddenly change course based on informal discussions was still a possibility for officials and policymakers. Roosevelt's haphazard administration regarding issues of Far East subsequently left the post-war future of Asia uncertain and vague. Therefore, the inevitable selection of the strategy created inside the bureaucratic setup, which characterized American style to deal with Japan once the war concluded, was an accident arising out of the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

- ⁱ Press conference no. 888, 30 March 1943. In Basil Rauch ed. *The Roosevelt Reader, Selected Speeches, Messages, Press Conferences, and Letters of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, (New York: Rinehart, 1957): p. 323-325.
- ⁱⁱ Advisory committee initial meeting, 12 Feb 1942. *Post-world War II Foreign Policy Planning, State Department Records of Harley Notter, 1939-1945*, p. 548-51.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War Against Japan, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): p. 9
- ^{iv} Joseph Grew to Stanley Hornbeck, 25 February 1941, Joseph C. Grew Papers.
- ^v Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Joseph Grew, 21 January 1941, Stanley K Hornbeck Papers.
- ^{vi} Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries, 20 October 1942, p. 163
- ^{vii} Henry Wallace to Franklin Roosevelt, 10 July 1944, FDR Office Files Part II
- ^{viii} Joseph Grew, as quoted in John K Emmerson, *The Japanese Thread: A Life in the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978): p. 102.
- ^{ix} Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, p. 113.
- ^x Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. 88.
- ^{xi} Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, p. 77-89.
- ^{xii} Jim Bishop, *FDR's last year: April 1944-April 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975): p. 41.
- ^{xiii} *Reminiscences of Walter Lippmann*, p. 220-221.
- ^{xiv} November 7, 1940. *The Adolf A Berle Diary*, (1978): p. 211.
- ^{xv} September 26, 1944. *The Adolf A Berle Diary*, p. 376.
- ^{xvi} March 29 1945, Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries, p. 207-210.
- ^{xvii} Calendar notes, November 27 1944. Thomas M. Campbell and George C. Herring, *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., 1943-1946*. (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975): p. 184-185.
- ^{xviii} Franklin Roosevelt, "The Average American and the Average Japanese Have Very Cloudy and Often Erroneous Points of View About Each Other" 30 April 1925, in Donald Carmichael ed., *F.D.R., Columnist; the Uncollected Columns of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1947), p. 57-58.
- ^{xix} Franklin Roosevelt, "We Lack a Sense of Humor If We Forget That Not So Very Long Ago, We Were Immigrants Ourselves," 21 April 1925, in Donald Carmichael ed, *F.D.R., Columnist*, p. 38.
- ^{xx} Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001): p. 11.
- ^{xxi} Franklin Roosevelt to Chief of Operations, 10 August 1936. FDR Office File Part 3, RSC.
- ^{xxii} Correspondence between Frank Knox and Franklin Roosevelt, 23 and 26 February 1942. FDR Office Files Part 1, RSC.
- ^{xxiii} Franklin Roosevelt to Henry Stimson, 1 February 1943. Henry Wallace Papers, RSC.
- ^{xxiv} FDR speech to congress, 6 Jan 1942, Quoted in "The Nature of the Enemy" 11, August 1942, OWI, Bol, Reports and Special Memoranda
- ^{xxv} "Foes Won't Escape Occupation Again, President Asserts," *New York Times*, 18, August 1944.
- ^{xxvi} "The Nature of the Enemy" 11 August 1942, OWI, Bol, reports and special memoranda
- ^{xxvii} Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, p. 120.