Machiavelli in Modern Times:

Political Theory in the Leadership of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt During the Second World War

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I would like to thank my parents for their unending support and their constant fueling of my curiosity. Without your encouragement, I could never be where I am today.

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Introduction

Leadership requires many strategies and techniques, and in politics, the stakes are high. During World War II, in particular, the consequences of failed leadership could have altered the future of political order across the globe. However, the Big Three, the leaders of the allied US, UK and the USSR successfully navigated the perils of war to victory. This study aims to understand if the actual leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin matched any patterns that political theorists may have predicted. Specifically, this thesis aims to understand if Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin utilized Machiavellian frameworks or techniques in their executive roles.

Few theorists were as provocative as Niccoló Machiavelli. Famously, the Florentine strategist crafted a detailed and controversial theory on how to lead a state as an executive in his treatise, The Prince. While this work focused on principalities, Machiavelli’s principles can be applied to many different forms of political leadership. This thesis offers a limited analysis of Machiavelli’s writings, restricting the research to The Prince to make the project more feasible and to eliminate potential contradictions in Machiavelli’s canon. In the scope of research, though, this thesis investigates how readily The Prince’s theoretical model of leadership was actually adopted by the main Allied leaders in World War II.

The application of Machiavelli to the Big Three accomplishes three core academic tasks. First, this thesis isolates lauded traits from the text of The Prince, creating a leadership framework to which ideal Machiavellian leaders adhere, while also clarifying and analyzing the text itself. Next, this research matches this framework with the WWII tenures of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, providing unique historical leadership analysis and casting new insights on the Big Three. Finally, this thesis demonstrates a potential new methodology for leadership analysis,
applying classic theorists to modern examples, though any additional applications are for future research.

Within the scope of this thesis, clear Machiavellian patterns emerged in the thorough accounts of the WWII tenures of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt. First, there is no compelling evidence that these leaders acted because of *The Prince*. However, this research clearly demonstrates that the Big Three certainly acted in the spirit of the treatise to varying extents. Stalin, the most notoriously authoritarian of the three Allied leaders, demonstrated his strength of will, but made multiple aberrations from a Machiavellian framework in his foreign and military failings, despite ultimately maneuvering to become a geopolitical superpower. Churchill, on the other hand, demonstrated many actions and traits espoused in *The Prince* in foreign and military affairs, but famously lost domestic power before the war was over. Interestingly, Roosevelt proved the most Machiavellian of all, managing to maintain foreign, military and domestic dominance until his death at the end of the war.

In all, through intentional design, a well-researched theoretical framework and a thorough applied theory and analysis, this thesis successfully answers the question: *How did the political philosophy of Machiavelli in The Prince manifest itself in the WWII leadership of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin?*
Design

The research design of this thesis is twofold. First, it develops a summarized framework of Machiavelli’s leadership advice in *The Prince*. Second, this framework is applied to the case studies of executive leadership in World War II. After applying this framework to specific instances and actions, the actual applicability or use of Machiavellian techniques can be determined.

For the purposes of this study, the understanding of Machiavelli’s leadership philosophy will come from *The Prince*. Generally, this research will be a qualitative analysis, requiring argumentation and interpretation. However, to make this thesis as objective as possible, Machiavelli’s political leadership ideology will be identified, defined and codified into simple clauses and groupings. After a review and analysis of *The Prince*, this thesis will develop key traits or elements that can be identified as “Machiavellian.” This research will pull in Machiavelli’s own words and descriptions from the context of Renaissance Italy and generate a more universal depiction of the Florentine’s ideology.

*The Prince* can broadly be divided into two themes, descriptive politics and normative politics. These two themes are interwoven throughout the work, but are identifiable by their word choice and subject matter. His descriptive claims depict his interpretation of the political landscape. Using a mix of historical and Renaissance examples and sweeping generalities, he attempts to describe how the world is, in particular the world of an executive head of state. These are informative and provocative in their own right, but are not relevant to this thesis. Arguing about the validity of Machiavelli’s world view in *The Prince* in the context of World War II is a daunting proposition and beyond the scope or capacity of this research.
Instead, this work will focus on the normative prescriptions Machiavelli details in *The Prince*. Throughout his treatise, the Florentine advises leaders on certain ways to act, with phrases like “the prince must” or “a prince should” (Machiavelli, 1988, 42, 58). This thesis will identify these norms and group Machiavelli’s guiding principles for a leader. Additionally, this work will add interpretations and modernizations of *The Prince*’s leadership criteria, taking the work from a monarchic, Renaissance context and making it applicable to an executive, 20th-century context. Ultimately, with the amalgamation of all these statements, the image of an ideal Machiavellian leader will appear.

This Machiavellian image and his underlying leadership criteria can then be taken and compared with the careers and actions of actual historical leaders. Through analysis and argumentation, leadership histories can be weighed against these criteria to determine how Machiavellian the leaders were or were not. In the present thesis, these criteria will be applied to the careers of the Big Three during the Second World War to determine if their actions generally reflected a Machiavellian technique, strategy or understanding of politics. The exact criteria are described in the Theoretical Framework.

After exhaustive reading on Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt, this Theoretical Framework will be applied to their personal histories in order to make broad arguments about their actions during World War II. The specific cases selected are used as examples of general trends and attitudes in play throughout the war. They are meant to be illustrative of a broader pattern of leadership identified and explained in the Applied Theory sections. The specific cases chosen are organized based on a logical grouping of Machiavelli’s leadership traits. The groupings reflect multiple aspects of modern political leadership spanning the breadth of any politician’s career, namely, foreign affairs, military affairs, domestic affairs and interspersed with personal conduct.
Other analyses could arrange Machiavelli’s leadership criteria in a variety of ways, but this thesis will broadly group theoretical criteria and historical action along those categories for better understanding and argumentation.

To start, this thesis will compare Machiavelli’s traits with Joseph Stalin’s leadership in the USSR. First, this research will investigate Stalin’s foreign affairs, in particular his non-aggression treaty with Hitler, followed by his ignorance of changing Nazi attitudes, then his ultimate use of Allied resources. Second, the study will focus on Stalin’s military exploits during the war, notably the attacks on Poland and Finland, the response to German aggression, the defense of Moscow, the purging of military personnel and then general military strategy. Next, there will be an investigation on Stalin’s domestic affairs during the war, especially his deportation and arrest of dissident groups. Throughout, the thesis will include Stalin’s personal conduct, ranging from his rhetoric, to his advisors and lastly to his image and temperament. These specific and important examples can create a general inference as to Stalin’s adherence to Machiavelli’s political understandings.

Next, this thesis will apply a Machiavellian understanding of leadership to Winston Churchill’s time as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. First, this research will focus on the circumstances of Churchill’s foreign affairs, especially his relation to staying in the war despite the surrender of France and some domestic pressure for appeasement. Next, the thesis will look at his military policy, in particular his retreat at Dunkirk, his rhetoric during the Battle of Britain and his push for action in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Further, this investigation will cover Churchill’s domestic policy and action, covering his initial success in coalition building, but also his ultimate loss of the premiership. In all the sections, this paper will review Churchill’s personal conduct, notably his closest advisors and his own temperament and image. These
actions and events offer an overview of Churchill’s policy choices, and can serve as a barometer of the Prime Minister’s Machiavellian leanings.

Then, the understanding of Machiavelli’s leadership framework must be analyzed in relation to U.S. executive leadership under Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Second World War. This thesis will track four major realms in FDR’s tenure as measuring points for his style of leadership. First, this will look in-depth at his actions in foreign relations, notably his initial decision to stay out of the War, but also his supplying of resources to both the UK and the USSR. Next, research will follow Roosevelt’s military decisions, focusing on the opening of a second front in Europe and his general military appointments and decisions. After, there will be an investigation of FDR’s domestic affairs, such as his use of internment camps and election success. Within these sections, Roosevelt’s rhetoric, circle of advisors and temperament can also be revealed. These illustrative cases should provide ample evidence as to how FDR chose to lead, and how his style did or did not reflect a Machiavellian understandings of politics.

Finally, the Allied Relations section will cover direct interactions between the Big Three. The work between Roosevelt and Churchill will feature heavily, with details about their negotiations and alliance, solidified through the Atlantic Charter, numerous arms supply deals and notoriously through a joint nuclear weapons development pact. The Tehran and Yalta conferences, the only time the Big Three leaders interacted together in person, will serve as final case studies to epitomize and understand the Machiavellian traits, or lack thereof, among Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin.

Ultimately, these different case studies provide real-life application of Machiavelli’s principles and judge the leadership decisions of the “Big Three” through the lens of a political
theory framework. This design will effectively answer if the Machiavellian tendencies of *The Prince* expressed themselves in the Big Three and to what extent.

**Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

Machiavelli’s most famous work, *The Prince*, makes a number of normative claims about what a leader, in this case a prince, should do in order to maintain his state. On its face, these claims apply to the leader of a principality, especially in the context of Renaissance Italy. However, this thesis identifies these claims and reinterprets them in a modern context applicable to any executive leader, making Machiavelli useful to leadership analyses of any recent executive. Cumulatively, these claims create a leadership model. To identify these different claims, this research has parsed the text of *The Prince* and selected all passages with normative statements, centering on the phrases “must” and “should.” These statements are then grouped into four broad categories: domestic affairs, foreign affairs, military affairs and personal conduct. These categories are used purely for organization and for ease of analysis and seemed the most logical, exhaustive and exclusive grouping. Naturally, there is occasional overlap of a criterion between the categories, which will come more in to play during the application of this framework to actual leadership scenarios. This framework explanation, though, will identify each normative criterion from *The Prince* and explain its relevance in a modern context and grouping, helping to establish an overall image of leadership.

**Domestic Affairs**

Understandably, Machiavelli’s advice to a prince includes the ordering of affairs within the principality itself. His directions suggest how a leader should order, influence and ultimately control a state’s citizenry. The Florentine’s suggestions follow below.
1. *Use force when necessary:* In Machiavelli’s words, “things must be ordered in such a mode that when [the people] no longer believe, one can make them believe by force” (1988, 24). Essentially, leaders who intend to change the order or norms in a society need to have force to bring about those changes. Machiavelli claims that the establishment of a new social order cannot be done merely through the introduction of a belief structure. Rather, this new belief structure needs to be supported by the threat or use of force. He cites the historical-mythological examples of “Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Romulus,” saying that the adoption of their new “constitutions” would have faltered “if they had been unarmed” (1998, 24). In a modern context, this concept implies that leaders need enforcement mechanisms to push through social, policy and normative changes. Belief alone is not sufficient.

2. *Perform injuries together:* Simply, *The Prince* argues, “for injuries must be done all together” (1988, 38). Injuries, in this context, are negative impacts or evils performed on the citizenry that are deemed necessary to establish power and control of the state. In an ancient context, this could range from killing citizens to lying, betrayal and beyond (Machiavelli, 1988, 35). Machiavelli urges that if cruel acts must be done, that a prince should perform them “at a stroke” so that “tasted less, they offend less” (Machiavelli, 1988, 38). If a leader has to act with evil, do it in one stroke, making it overwhelming and less noticed on the basis of any individual action. By performing negative actions all at once, the public enmity is concentrated temporally, making it easier to ultimately placate the citizens and maintain good relations. In a contemporary setting, Machiavelli’s advice encourages leaders to pass or enforce disagreeable policies in concentration, thus mitigating the reputational impacts of each individual negative policy.
3. *Spread the benefits*: As opposed to injuries, “benefits should be done little by little” (Machiavelli, 1988, 38). *The Prince* holds that leaders should spread benefits out over time to placate and please the population over a longer period. Spread-out benefits create goodwill over a sustained timespan, maintaining positive citizen-leader relations. For modern leaders, this means releasing positive policy breaks and news throughout their leadership tenure, rather than all at once. Frequency of benefits matters more than intensity in Machiavelli’s world.

4. *Fear the great in society*: According to the Florentine theorist, “the prince must be on guard against [the great in the society], and fear them as if they were open enemies” (1988, 40). The great are the powerful and influential in a given society. Leaders should be worried about great persons in their society who are not obligated to the leader for their position. Potentially, the non-obligated persons could be ambitious and turn on the leader in times of adversity, undermining the leader’s position or authority for their own gain. Machiavelli encourages the prince to “fear them as if they were open enemies” (1988, 40). Contemporary leaders also should be wary of influential members of society according to this theory, as these great influencers could challenge a leader’s policy, leadership position or very authority.

5. *Breed dependency in citizenry*: Machiavelli’s theory in *The Prince* also states that “the prince must think of a way by which his citizens, always and in every quality of time, have need of the state and of himself” (1988, 42). Essentially, leaders should craft dependency among the citizenry so that the people do not abandon the state in times of crises. A leader already depends on the citizens for their own authority. When the leader and the state become necessary for the citizens’ survival, mutual dependency is assured.
Ultimately, this guarantees a faithful citizenry to the prince. In modern times, this same principle applies, encouraging leaders to intertwine the state and its policies with the functioning and well-being of an individual’s everyday existence. Citizens will remain loyal to the state as necessary to their own well-being according to *The Prince*.

6. *Avoid blame, take credit:* Machiavelli’s treatise holds that “princes should have anything blamable administered by others, favors by themselves” (1988, 75). Most simply, princes want direct association with positive, not negative consequences. Thus, the administration of policy and the subsequent attribution of responsibility are important. Contemporarily, this maxim can be summarized as leaders should avoid blame and take credit. Leaders can gain associations with positive elements and deflect negative associations through proper administration and communication.

7. *Maintain an environment for business:* The Florentine also believes that a prince “should inspire his citizens to follow their [economic] pursuits” (1988, 91). A leader is responsible for generating an environment where individuals can carry out everyday activities without drastic state intervention. Citizens should not be afraid to be economically active. According to *The Prince*, this is beneficial to a leader, getting a satisfied and active populace, but also a more powerful and influential state through economic growth and trade. Contemporarily, leaders should create environments where economic pursuits can continue day to day, though the methodology and policy has changed since the Renaissance era.

8. *Entertain the people:* Interestingly, Machiavelli demands that a prince “should…keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles” at different times throughout the year (1988, 91). The use of state-funded entertainment here likely acts as a generator of
goodwill from the people toward the ruler. While this was common practice among leaders of the day, especially with religious festivals, the act nonetheless creates a population that is loyal and thankful to the prince, as well as potentially distracted. Contemporarily, Machiavelli would also encourage leaders to entertain the populous on occasion, though the classical festivals like those of the Roman era are likely out-of-date. New leaders should use spectacles when possible, though, in order to create awe, distraction and thankfulness among the people.

9. Account for diverse groups: Finally, in the domestic sphere, *The Prince* encourages a leader to “take account of those [diverse] communities [within a state and] meet with them sometimes” (1988, 91). Plainly, a leader should reach out to different groups within their state and meet with them to demonstrate humanity and interest. States are not homogenous, and leaders need to understand and show respect to a variety of backgrounds and groups. In modern society, this involves meeting with different ethnic, national and racial groups, as well as different political, economic and special interest organizations. Keeping these multitudes happy ensures a better functioning state and more loyalty to the leader.

Taken together, all of these domestic policies and tactics create an image of a leader intent on keeping order and loyalty among the state’s population. Machiavelli’s ideal prince tries to control the citizenry through a variety of methods, but ultimately wants a docile, faithful and productive state. *The Prince* emphasizes that the core power of a ruler comes from the relations with those being ruled. A strong leader will maintain a relationship of power, respect and necessity where the citizens will follow the policies of a leader out of their own self-interest, but will also not rebel through dependency and even fear.
Foreign Affairs

While domestic policies are important, a principality or state only exists if it can maintain its independence and autonomy. Naturally, then, Machiavelli sought to focus some of his treatise on how leaders should manage foreign affairs and relations with other leaders and states. By properly navigating external pressures, leaders could create conditions for internal success. The suggestions are below.

1. *Caress or eliminate enemies*: The Prince recognized that political leaders are going to have adversaries or enemies. According to Machiavelli, these “men should either be caressed or eliminated” (1988, 10). Specifically, the Florentine was discussing occupation strategy for conquered territory and people, but his lesson can be interpreted in a broader, modern sense, too. Machiavelli’s fear was retribution from antagonistic populations. His advice then is that when dealing with enemies, leaders should act so that revenge is not possible. Either act so harshly that an enemy cannot seek revenge or act so leniently that an enemy will not want revenge.

2. *Be the defender of lesser powers*: In regard to neighboring states, Machiavelli urges a prince to “make himself head and defender of the neighboring lesser powers” (1988, 11). A leader should ensure that neighboring powers are weak and dependent on the leader’s own state. By defending lesser powers, leaders make other states dependent on them so that those neighbors do not encourage invasion or attack from larger foreign powers. In a modern sense, allying with neighbors creates a buffer state where powerful foreign enemies cannot exert much influence. By defending a lesser power, a leader discourages neighbors from attacking or enlisting foreign help in
undermining the leader’s state. Machiavelli also encourages the weakening of the powerful within neighboring states to increase a prince’s own influence there.

3. **Build weak enemies to crush:** Perhaps counter-intuitively, the Florentine suggests that “A wise prince…should astutely nourish some enmity so that when he has crushed it, his greatness emerges the more from it” (1988, 85). Essentially, Machiavelli believes a leader should build up weak or false enemies that can be easily beaten in order to gain repute. His opinion is that princes gain notoriety and prestige when they overcome obstacles, so creating a weaker enemy allows a conquerable obstacle. In a modern sense, this can apply to foreign affairs, but also to domestic affairs where leaders gain repute for stifling domestic disturbances, too. Often, the portrayal of an enemy as stronger than actual facts indicate can make a victory reflect more positively on the leader, as well.

4. **Do not be neutral:** Machiavelli encourages his leaders to be decisive in foreign affairs, stating “a prince is also esteemed when… without any hesitation he discloses himself in support of someone against another” (1988, 89). Simply, a leader should always take sides rather than remain neutral, at least when it comes to allying with neighboring states in conflict. Allying with a winning combatant allows for sharing in friendship rather than fear of invasion. Allying with a losing combatant allows for refuge in the event of persecution by the winning force. Remaining neutral only breeds distrust from both combatants. In a modern sense, this principle would likely extend to multi-national alliances, too. Machiavelli would not want countries near the conflict to remain neutral and draw enmity and distrust from multiple groups.
5. *Beware more powerful allies:* On the other hand, Machiavelli also preaches caution when entering into alliances, especially when deciding to attack. He states, “a prince must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself so as to attack others, except when necessity presses” (1988, 91). A leader should avoid attacking in alliance with a more powerful state because after victory, the powerful state can control you unopposed. This is different than refusing to remain neutral because the prince in this instance is instigating an attack on an enemy. If a state needs allied forces to attack an enemy, the state is likely not strong enough to defend itself from the ally should the positive relationship falter. In a modern sense, this idea discourages joint attacks when a leader possesses a weaker force. Machiavelli wants to avoid giving more power to an already powerful state. Eliminating an enemy only shores up an ally’s power, perhaps to the detriment of the weaker state.

In all, Machiavelli is very adamant about maintaining balance in the realm of foreign affairs. His view is an anarchic one, where enemies are everywhere and alliances are temporary. To this end, he encourages taking power when possible by eliminating enemies and breeding dependency among neighbors. When taking power is not possible, Machiavelli advises against aiding other states in their endeavors to gain power, as counterbalancing forces are necessary to maintaining a leader’s own stability and control over a state.

**Military Affairs**

Occasionally, though, alliances fail and states must act with military force. Here, Machiavelli also has advice for his princes.
1. *Remain resolute during a siege*: According to the Florentine, “a powerful and spirited prince will always overcome [an attack or siege], now by giving hope to his subjects that the evil will not last long, now by giving them fear of the enemy’s cruelty, now by securing himself skillfully against those who appear to him too bold” (1988, 44). *The Prince* assigns multiple responsibilities to a leader during siege. First, they need to remain positive and liven the citizenry. Second, a leader should balance that positivity with a negative fear of the enemy, making the people more loyal to the prince. Finally, too, a leader needs to be wary of those within his state who will either attack rashly out of frustration or try to undermine authority. In modern times, siege warfare is somewhat outdated, but prolonged wars or battles could have similar psychological and attritional effects on a population as a siege. By acting steadily both during and after attacks, leaders will earn the trust and loyalty of their citizens and be able to pursue a war or battle to its completion with citizen support.

2. *Do not use foreign armies*: Once war has commenced, Machiavelli advises that “a wise prince… has preferred to lose with his own [arms] than to win with others” (1988, 55). Simply, a leader should avoid enlisting aid of foreign militaries or mercenaries to win battles. Using other armies breeds dependency either on mercenary forces or on foreign aid. This undermines the capacity of state sovereignty, authority and one’s own military and will ultimately cause loss in the end. In modern times, mercenary forces have somewhat changed in form, but leaders will often still work in conjunction with foreign armies. Machiavelli’s tenet here may be undermined by the contemporary use of multinational military operations and alliances, but the underlying sentiment of using a state’s own military strength remains.
3. **Be a military expert**: Bluntly, the Florentine argues that “a prince should have no other object…but that of war and its orders and disciplines” (1988, 58). To Machiavelli, a leader, at their core, should be incredibly well-versed in military affairs, as it allows for the ultimate preservation of the state. The art of war is the sole art “which concerns the one who commands” (1988, 58). In order to command a state, both from internal and external threats, a prince needs to have force. The prince that ignores this focus will be conquered. Moreover, a prince ignorant of military affairs will not have the trust and respect of his forces. In modern times, this focus on military affairs could be amended to having defense and military be the top priority for the leader of any state. A leader focused on military affairs will have a significantly higher chance of succeeding in war, which can ultimately wipe out a nation if lost. Further, expertise in military affairs will garner respect and loyalty from the military establishment.

4. **Do not be idle in peace**: Even when there is no war, Machiavelli stresses that leaders should remain prepared, saying that “a wise prince should… never remain idle in peaceful times” (1988, 60). A leader should actively work in peacetime to prepare for future conflict. By preparing during peacetime, a leader can create capacity to later wage war. This preparation can be a deciding factor in the ultimate conflict. Contemporarily, this means that military and defense forces need to be constantly vigilant and prepared for a multitude of deployments and possibilities. Further, training and investment must be taken in peacetime to increase and better a military’s capacity, choosing to fund it even without the threat of immediate conflict.

5. **Perform great acts**: More vaguely related to military affairs is Machiavelli’s advice that “nothing makes a prince so much esteemed as to carry on great enterprises” (1988, 87).
This could be more broadly interpreted in the modern day, but for Machiavelli, he lists multiple examples of daring military campaigns and conquests as examples of great enterprises. These bold victories give a prince more power, but also reputation and captivation among average citizens. A bold leader will be followed more readily and an active leader will keep the populace occupied with these great enterprises’ outcomes, potentially distracting from negative aspects of rule. More broadly, Machiavelli also encouraged “rare examples…in governing internally,” encouraging leaders to be bold and captivating home and abroad (1988, 88). In a modern context, bold military expeditions still exist, but domestic enterprises are more frequent avenues in the more constrained international context.

Overall, Machiavelli’s military advice revolves around reputation and capacity. First, a leader has to command an effective military that is always prepared and can stand on its own against a multitude of forces. The leader’s own expertise is imperative to maintaining effectiveness in the troops, but it also generates loyalty and repute. *The Prince* urges leaders to have a great military reputation in order to maintain respect from the military and citizenry, but also to create a positive and admiring public that is focused on a leader’s military adventures. An active and public leader will be lauded by both citizens and military alike, gaining more power both through conquest and reputation.

**Personal Conduct and Image**

More than just policy and actions though, leaders are also judged by their personal conduct. Citizens make judgements based on how they perceive their leaders’ choices and
morality. The application of Machiavellian conduct expresses itself in foreign, military and domestic affairs and the particulars are detailed below.

1. **Appear great:** Machiavelli urges leaders to keep up appearances, stating that a prince “should contrive that greatness, spiritedness, gravity and strength are recognized in his actions” (1988, 72). As in military enterprises, leaders should aspire to be personally seen as embodiments of their great acts. Personal conduct readily affects public perception. A leader needs their citizens and their advisors to admire the leader, gaining loyalty through honor and respect. Machiavelli sums up that a leader who appears great in the public eye will have “no one [who] thinks either of deceiving him or of getting around him” (1988, 72). In modern leadership, Machiavelli would likely want leaders to cultivate their self-image of grandeur, maintaining notoriety and repute among the general population. This idealization will further entrench a leader’s power.

2. **Read history:** To maintain power, though, the Florentine urges that “a prince should read histories and consider in them the actions of excellent men” in order to emulate them (1988, 60). Machiavelli spends significant portions of his treatise analyzing historical leaders, so naturally, he suggests modern leaders study the mistakes and success of the past. This learning can easily be used to guide action as many lessons apply to leadership in a universal context. Fittingly, Machiavelli’s advice to Renaissance princes applies to modern leaders, too. A contemporary leader should be well read and understand historical successes and failures in order to emulate the victories and avoid the shortcomings.

3. **Avoid public vices:** While Machiavelli urges a prince to appear great in public, the opposite is also true and “it is necessary for him… to avoid the infamy of those vices that would take his state from him” (1988, 62). The Florentine has a laundry list of vices and
traits that are generally held in a negative light, but he admits that it would be impossible to “wholly observe” their opposite, positive traits (1988, 62). Instead he focuses on princes avoiding a reputation for any particularly negative traits, which he describes in detail in later sections. Overall, this concept translates almost directly to modern times, in that a leader should avoid demonstrating vices, at least publicly, that could jeopardize their repute among the citizens and thus jeopardize power over the state.

4. *Infamy for vices can be necessary:* However, *The Prince* does not shy away from using vices when needed, and Machiavelli has become synonymous with the advice “one should not care about incurring the fame of those vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state” (1998, 62). Simply, Machiavelli urges that in dire straits, leaders must do what is necessary to preserve their state, regardless of their infamy. More succinctly, the ends can justify the means. Machiavelli urges, “do not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity” (1988, 70). Avoiding infamy for vices and performing evil itself are secondary to maintaining control, authority and order. This applies more subtly to modern leaders, who should not worry about gaining a reputation for certain negative attributes if they lead to increased state security and continuing maintenance of power.

5. *Be frugal:* After outlining the occasional need for acting with vices for the maintenance of power and the state, Machiavelli lists the vices that are sometimes necessary. To start, he advises that princes “should not…care about a name for meanness” (1988, 63). In this instance, *The Prince* refers to being frugal with money and spending. A leader cannot be liberal with money on public or private spending and still maintain proper fiscal reserves that take the burden off the public during times of dire need like war. Rather, while held a
vice, meanness and parsimony help “enable [a prince] to rule” (1988, 64). In modern contexts, a reputation for parsimony is not a detractor, but rather is a sign of good fiscal responsibility and preparedness.

6. **Do not be hated:** As a caveat to all of the use of vices, Machiavelli insists that “a prince should guard against being contemptible and hated” (1988, 65). Hatred leads to retribution and instability, the opposite of a prince’s desired stable order. Machiavelli worries in particular that financial imprudence can garner hatred for the leader among the population, reinforcing his call for meanness. Contemporarily, a leader needs to avoid outright hatred of the citizens, because that will ultimately lead to dismissal from rule.

7. **Be cruel when necessary for order:** Machiavelli continues to argue in favor of occasional vices in personal conduct when describing cruelty. Though it is to be avoided if possible, he argues that a prince “should not care about the infamy of cruelty” because it will often be “more merciful” than “allow[ing] disorders to continue” (1988, 65). Machiavelli claims that occasional cruelty to establish order can ultimately be what is best for a state and its inhabitants. Order is safer than chaos and better in the long term for the citizens, the state and the power of the prince. In a modern sense, using cruelty probably is more loosely defined as harsh measures and force in order to stifle disorder and maintain authority. However, these vices remain last resorts.

8. **Be feared:** In order to remain effective in using vices, a prince needs to keep a population loyal. To this end, Machiavelli advises that “the prince should nonetheless make himself feared in such a mode that if he does not acquire love, he escapes hatred” (1988, 67) A leader should try to be feared and loved, but fear is safer. According to *The Prince*, in times of strife, citizens are more likely to break bonds and loyalty held by love than those
held by fear. Again, it is important that a prince’s personal character be formidable, creating an infamy and reputation that engenders loyalty and respect, even in the hardest moments. This creation of a persona of fear must be tempered by the avoidance of hate, though. For a modern leader, the importance of being feared is limited by the powers of an executive. However, fear of authority does continue to garner respect, order and adherence to the state.

9. **Be clever and strong**: With the element of fear, though, comes the added importance of intelligence. As Machiavelli describes in metaphor, “one needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten wolves” (1988, 69). Here he holds that a leader should be both clever and strong, using trickery and force as needed. The analogy of the fox is one of cleverness, slyness and observation while the lion emanates power and generates fear. Machiavelli wants his leaders to have both elements present, with each element supporting the other. The metaphor extends almost directly to modern contexts, where cleverness and strength are both wanted in a contemporary leader.

10. **Prepare to break promises**: A clever leader, according to Machiavelli, will recognize that lying and breaking promises are sometimes necessary, saying “a prudent lord… cannot observe faith…when such observance turns against him” (1988, 69). Succinctly, a leader should keep his word only as far as it is prudent. Machiavelli holds this as a necessity because he claims men are not trustworthy. If keeping a pact or a promise will result in the unsettling of the state, a leader should break their word. The same applies to a modern leader where pacts should be broken if necessity requires.

11. **Appear virtuous**: While Machiavelli has advised princes to act in perhaps unseemly ways, he does recognize that, for leaders, “it is indeed necessary to appear to have [virtues]”
Citizens want leaders they can admire, at least superficially. To Machiavelli, then, a leader must appear to be full of positive virtues, namely being “merciful, faithful, humane, honest and religious” in the eyes of the general public (1988, 70). The adherence to these virtues is not important, except for maintaining goodwill among the members of the state. For any contemporary leader, appearances and adherence to societal standards of virtue continue to matter in much the same way.

12. Pick good advisors: Ultimately, Machiavelli recognizes that a prince’s personal conduct is not enough to maintain a state, and that an advisory inner circle is necessary. The Florentine has two-fold advice with advisors. First, he insists that “a prince should think of the minister so as to keep him good” (1988, 94). Simply, a leader needs to be mindful of his advisors’ intelligence and ambition, honoring them and making them dependent on the leader’s power and support. This awareness can help consolidate and maintain power for a leader. Secondly, Machiavelli wants good advisors, stating that “a prudent prince must… choos[e] wise men in his state; and only to these should he give freedom to speak the truth to him” (1988, 94). A leader needs to have wise advisors in order to increase the collective information and decision making capability of the state. This is especially true of modern leaders with significantly larger and more complex states. Leaders need to keep their advisors in check, but they must make sure that the best and brightest are in the room.

13. Take counsel when wanted, but take it well: Machiavelli finally and fittingly advises a prince on how to take advice from an inner circle. First, he requires that “a prince… should always take counsel, but when he wants” (1988, 95). This keeps ultimate authority and impetus with the leader. Advisors cannot overstep the prince’s own agenda and sense
of what is important. The power and direction of the state remains in the hands of the leader. However, to rightly direct the state, the leader “should be a very broad questioner, and… a patient listener to the truth” (1988, 95). To fully gauge the needs of a state, a leader should be curious and engaged on many topics. Most importantly, Machiavelli coyly suggests that princes accept truth when they recognize a valid argument. For contemporary leadership, this advice stresses empiricism and accepting of potentially unwanted conclusions in order to best understand and react to the needs of the state.

In all, Machiavelli’s advice for a leader’s personal conduct is seen as contradictory to many traditional models of leadership. The conduct of a Machiavellian prince is one that relies on appearing traditional, but breaking from those norms when necessity beckons. Ultimately, a leader’s persona and conduct should generate loyalty and fear, as adoration often means little in times of strife according to the Florentine. Machiavelli’s final advice, though, is to heed good advice, urging the keeping of wise counselors around the prince who can offer guidance on matters of personal conduct and beyond. Perhaps implicitly, Machiavelli is urging leaders to listen to his own advice.

**Applied Theory: Stalin**

Machiavelli’s direct influences on Joseph Stalin are not clear, nor are they particularly important for this thesis. Robert Service, the historian, claims that Stalin both read *The Prince* and “annotated and owned his own copy of it” (2005, 343). However, the copy no longer exists in the archives, casting uncertainty on his true relationship with the treatise. What matters is how Stalin did or did not act in a Machiavellian fashion during the Second World War.
Though Stalin held many different positions in Soviet leadership before and after the Russian revolution, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, he had managed to consolidate power to the extent that he “had become the dictator of the USSR in all but name” (Service, 2005, 287). This authoritarian executive rule would continue throughout WWII and expressed itself in Stalin’s foreign affairs, military choices, domestic policies and personal conduct. In his ruthlessness, Stalin’s decisions and choices mirrored a Machiavellian prince. However, his lack of understanding and cunning in many aspects of foreign and military affairs, especially at the beginning of the war, demonstrated a deviation from The Prince’s framework.

Foreign Affairs

In foreign policy choices especially, the Soviet leader sometimes fell short of the Florentine’s ideal. Naturally, his policy relations chiefly concerned the two main powers of the war, the German-led Axis powers and the opposed Allied powers. However, Stalin’s foreign relations with these powers in the buildup and conduct of war proved erratic, both insightful at times and ignorant at others. Regardless of the foreign policy outcomes, Stalin’s policy choices occasionally, and meaningfully, diverged from Machiavelli’s tenets.

Most notoriously, as war neared in the late summer of 1939, Stalin chose to create an alliance with Hitler and Nazi Germany. During the preceding years, Germany had begun territorial expansion in Europe through annexation and appeasement. France and Britain provided particularly stout and vocal opposition to these actions, furthering an already volatile international political divide. With Hitler likely to invade Poland, Stalin and the USSR were faced with a security decision. The Soviets could side with Germany or the Allied powers of France and Great Britain. As tension grew, both the Allied powers and Germany made overtures
to Stalin and Moscow with the intent of forming a security pact. Ultimately, on August 23, 1939, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Germany (Conquest, 1991, 219-21).

This decision is controversial with its relation to a Machiavellian framework on foreign relations. On the one hand, The Prince urged leaders to not be neutral (1988, 89). Clearly, Stalin did not intend to remain on the sidelines of the impending world war, and he was torn between declaring security agreements with Germany or the Allied cause. He did, however, take a side, entering into alliance with Hitler. In Machiavellian terms, this makes sense, as Stalin avoided having both sets of belligerents being distrustful of the USSR. Instead, he aligned with at least one force, with the expectation of peace between the Soviets and the Nazis, even if that created enmity with Britain and France. His decision to ally with Germany, though, may have been ill-advised according to Machiavellian principles.

While the Florentine discouraged neutrality in conflict, he also warned against more powerful allies. Specifically, he said a leader “must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself so as to attack others, except when necessity presses” (91). As Hitler’s later advances show, Germany was a significantly more industrialized and militarized society than the USSR. In isolation, Machiavellian tenets suggest that Stalin’s association with Germany was ill-advised. By attacking in conjunction with a powerful ally, a check and balance on the power of the ally is removed. Yet, Stalin’s non-aggression pact enabled the eventual joint-invasion of Poland (Conquest, 1991, 222). In the selection of alliances, Stalin chose the more expansionist and bellicose side, almost guaranteeing the USSR’s involvement in a joint attack.

The German alliance ultimately weakened Soviet defenses and standing while also emboldening and empowering Germany. Further, it violated another Machiavellian tenet to be the “defender of the neighboring lesser powers” (1988, 11). In allying with Germany, Stalin
immediately swore off any claims as a potential defender of neighboring Poland. In an alliance with the British and French, the Soviets would have been joint allies against German intrusion into Poland. In Machiavelli’s rhetoric, this created multiple benefits for the protector state. First, Polish dependence created a larger Soviet sphere of influence and earned goodwill. Second, pledged defense discouraged expansion by other powerful states, like Germany. Finally, maintaining the territorial integrity of Poland ensured the existence of buffers between the USSR and Germany. Stalin instead allied with Germany, expanding jointly into Poland and the Baltic states as discussed in more detail later.

In isolation, these actions seem distinctly at odds with *The Prince*. In context, though, Stalin probably followed Machiavelli’s overarching advice to do whatever is necessary to preserve the state. The Soviet leader was not acting in isolation, but rather on the cusp of a world war. The imminence of German military action may have forced Stalin’s hand in joining the alliance. The non-aggression pact provided temporary peace with Germany, as well as the promise of Soviet expansion. Yes, Machiavelli explicitly warns against the use of alliances for expanding territory and influence, with the caveat of “except when necessity presses” (1988, 91). Yes, Stalin certainly entered into an alliance with a more powerful ally that in turn helped eliminate a buffer between Germany and the USSR. However, this decision may have been forced by “necessity.” As Conquest notes, Stalin had to choose between a security arrangement with Germany or the Anglo-French alliance. Yet the “collective security” of France and Britain “might not deter Hitler” and instead could have led to “Soviet involvement in an uncertain war” (1991, 221). A German alliance, though, allowed the USSR to continue improving its military capacity and avoid immediate conflict with the powerful German army. Simply, “peace with
Hitler would give Stalin a period of respite” (Service, 2005, 401). Stalin chose the Machiavellian path of survival at all costs.

Ultimately, Stalin’s decision to enter into a non-aggression pact with Hitler marked some divergence from a Machiavellian prince in outright theory, namely in the decision to ally with a more powerful state and attack a weaker state. However, in practice, Machiavelli urged acting out of necessity in order to preserve the state. Through a non-aggression pact, Stalin bought his country and military nearly two years to prepare for future conflict. Here, though, Stalin’s largest aberration from Machiavellian action in foreign affairs occurred. Despite the initial actions to delay war, the Soviet leader failed to adequately take advantage of peace time, and Stalin’s ignorance and lack of preparedness for Hitler’s betrayal in 1941 left his country in a dangerous situation.

Germany initiated Operation Barbarossa, its attack on the Soviet Union, in June of 1941. However, planning and operational logistics had been going on for months prior to the invasion. Germany clearly was “concentrating troops in Poland,” though Hitler was evasive on their purpose. Further, Germans began “reconnaissance overflights of Soviet territory” (Conquest, 1991, 234-5). Yet, throughout the build-up, Stalin remained indecisive. He did declare to some military leaders that war was possible, but conversely the Soviet leader refused to accept the validity of intelligence reports indicating German plans of attack. Instead, he became the “sole arbiter” of information and attempted to understand Hitler’s intentions. He took “a massive gamble with his country’s security,” and the gamble failed (Service, 2005, 412). Hitler did invade, and the Soviets were caught unprepared.

From a Machiavellian perspective, Stalin failed, too. The lack of military preparation will be addressed in the military affairs section, but notable in the foreign affairs category is Stalin’s
personal conduct. Stalin completely failed to gather and heed good advisors. *The Prince* demands that good leaders bring “wise men” or advisors for counsel and that the leader should “be a patient listener to truth,” meaning accepting of truthful advice or information (1988, 95). Under a Machiavellian framework, Stalin should have had a diverse set of intelligence reports on German actions and movements that were then reviewed and debated by an intelligent and diverse set of advisors and colleagues. Instead, Stalin had sycophants. When he received reports, he chalked them up to British misinformation or urged his intelligence chiefs to reach the same conclusion. He alone processed information, “prevent[ing] alternative counsels being put forward” (Conquest, 1991, 234). This is a direct divergence from the advice of *The Prince*, with its insistence on having a wise group of advisors and remaining receptive to good counsel. Stalin lacked good advisors and did not listen when truthful information or advice came to him.

Overall, Stalin’s foreign policy before the war did not strictly adhere to a Machiavellian framework, and often diverged significantly from what *The Prince* demanded of its ideal leader. His showing in Allied relations, discussed later, proved more Machiavellian, but his initial forays into international diplomacy were generally not in line with the Florentine’s thinking.

**Military Affairs**

Following the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, Stalin properly dictated military affairs, rather than solely foreign diplomacy. In military strategy, specifically his preparation for Hitler’s invasion and the Winter War, Stalin fell short of the cunning and expertise expected of a Machiavellian leader. However, with ruthlessness and determination, Stalin somewhat matched *The Prince*’s prescribed military leader and recovered to an extent from his strategic shortcomings.
Following Germany’s attack on Poland, the Soviet forces also mobilized and attacked from the east, quickly dismantling a strained and overmatched Polish force. Soon after, Stalin forced Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to allow entry of Soviet regiments, essentially annexing the countries under a military sphere of influence while expanding the USSR’s buffer. This initial burst of military expansion on the Polish and Baltic fronts at the start of WWII was finalized by Stalin’s treatment of Polish POWs. Ruthlessly and disturbingly, Stalin ordered the massacre of “about 15,000 Polish officers and others” at Katyn in Poland (Conquest, 1991, 229).

Though horrific, these various acts do follow a literal interpretation of a Machiavellian framework. Most explicitly, *The Prince* argues that “men should either be caressed or eliminated” in reference to potential enemies in occupied territory (10). In his murdering of surrendered combatants, Stalin followed Machiavelli’s advice nearly verbatim. While the Florentine might have urged restraint because of potential international repercussions, there is no doubt that the execution of POWs falls under the scope of his original dictum. *The Prince* chillingly states that men want to avenge themselves for “offenses but cannot do so for grave ones,” like death (1988, 10). More plainly, men want revenge for wrongs against them, but if the wrong is severe enough, such as massacre and elimination, no one is capable of taking revenge. Stalin eliminated potential enemies, ensuring that the Polish officers could not rebel against the Soviet occupiers in the future. This might not have been the best tactic according to Machiavelli, but it certainly was a tactical choice suggested by his writings.

More broadly, Machiavelli urges leaders to “carry on great enterprises,” specifically in reference to military campaigns (1988, 87). Stalin’s expansion into Poland and the Baltic states qualified as such an enterprise, using military force and intimidation to expand the power and influence of the Soviet state. Stalin attempted further expansion through his attacks on Finland.
Though continuing on the same Machiavellian thread of crushing enemies and carrying out great enterprises, the Winter War, as the conflict would be come to be called, also showed some of Stalin’s shortcomings as a Machiavellian leader. With the goal of obtaining more territory, creating a buffer for Leningrad, and obtaining more naval bases, Stalin attacked Finland in late November 1939. Though expecting a short war of “ten or twelve days,” the conflict raged for months with little progress and considerably higher losses than expected. Eventually, peace terms gained Soviets the territory they had sought in earlier negotiations, but at the cost of demonstrating military weakness (Conquest, 1991, 228).

Though he followed the dictum to embark on great enterprises, Stalin violated one of Machiavelli’s most emphasized tenets of executive leadership in his invasion of Finland. Succinctly, the Florentine writes that “a prince should have no other object… but that of war and its orders and disciplines” (1988, 58). The Prince requires leaders to be students of military strategy and focused on military expertise. Here, Stalin failed miserably. He grossly miscalculated the capacity of his own troops, and relied on his own shoddy military experience to determine broad strategy (Conquest, 1991, 228). Though he believed himself to be an expert of war, Stalin’s strategy showed him to be deficient in his understanding of military affairs.

The Machiavellian shortcomings of the Winter War were evident again in the preparation and response to the German invasion. As noted earlier, Germany offered clear signs of an impending attack, ranging from troop movements to intercepted communications. However, Stalin refused to counter-mobilize Soviet troops or prepare them explicitly for an invasion. According to Conquest, “even the most elementary orders for combat readiness only reached some of the troops after the war had already started.” Moreover, Stalin had no plan for war, had undersupplied key military equipment and had poorly located his defensive forces (1991, 237).
To make matters worse, Stalin had gutted the military leadership in the buildup to war as part of a larger societal purge. Between 1937 and 1938, Stalin oversaw a decimation of the creative talent and experienced leadership in the Red Army. In order to gain more authority and power, he rigged a military court to order the execution of the Army’s top commanders. This set off further executions and arrests that would lead to the discharge of “approximately 35,000 military leaders” (Whitewood, 2015, 1). With the invasion of Germany, the effects of the purge of the Red Army became readily apparent. Few to no officers had sufficient military training or experience at the start of the conflict, furthering confusion and ineffectiveness despite numerical advantages over the Germans. The Nazis quickly overwhelmed initial defensive resistance (Conquest, 1991, 236-7).

Stalin here diverges significantly from an ideal Machiavellian leader. Notably, in the case of the Red Army purge, he completely undercut his capacity to be an expert in war. For example, General Staff officers at the time were expected to have twelve to twenty years of training. In the purge, these officers “were almost all annihilated” (Conquest, 1991, 201). By eliminating most veteran and trained officers, he gutted the experience and institutional knowledge of the military. That is information that he also should have relied on to learn and grow as a commander. Without the military experts to advise, teach and challenge him, Stalin could not truly make “war and its orders and disciplines” his “art;” he tied his own hands (Machiavelli, 1988, 58). Beyond that, Stalin failed to follow Machiavelli’s guidelines in making use of peace time for the preparation for war. The Prince argues to “never remain idle in peaceful times,” yet Stalin refused to prepare his military for war (1988, 60). His army was out of position, surprised, undertrained and undersupplied. Stalin may have warded off earlier German invasion with the
Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, but the interim time was not used effectively as evidenced by the massive Nazi gains in the early months of the war.

The German troops continued to penetrate deep into Soviet territory in the fall of 1941, and “by mid-October the Germans were at the gates of Moscow” (Conquest, 1991, 248). Their proximity threw Stalin and the capital into a panic. Key government documents were burned, and high ranking officials began evacuating. Stalin had plans to follow soon after, with a train ready for him. However, “at the last moment,” Stalin changed his mind and stayed (Service, 2005, 420). According to Conquest, Stalin understood that “his leaving Moscow would be a severe moral defeat,” opting instead to take the symbolic risk of remaining in the capital (1991, 249).

Here, Stalin could not have acted in a more Machiavellian mode. The siege of Moscow is a rough analogue to the traditional sieges of city-states common at the time of The Prince’s writing. Moscow was surrounded, the population forced into city from the countryside, the military holding a thin barrier of defense while an enemy destroyed much in their path. In such a situation, Stalin acted just as a Machiavelli suggests a leader should. First, despite his initial shock at the outbreak of war, Stalin responded to the direct assault on Moscow in the “powerful and spirited” manner Machiavelli demands (1988, 44). By staying in the capital, unlike the French government for instance, Stalin was “giving hope to his subjects,” directly as The Prince advises (1988, 44). Stalin was a symbol of both the political and military might of the USSR. Continuation of a military parade in November and a “strong and effective speech” inside an air-raid raid shelter converted from a Metro station offered further evidence of Stalin’s resolute capacity in the face of siege (Conquest, 1991, 249). His actions importantly underlined the desire to stand and fight, allying the citizens of Moscow further with the state and the regime.
Machiavellian logic counselled leadership strength in siege in order to breed further dependency and loyalty of the people, and Stalin followed through.

If Moscow was Stalin’s strategic stroke of genius, his general military conduct offered sobering contrast. When German troops were overwhelming the Soviets in Ukraine, Stalin’s generals advised him to pull troops from the capital to save resources and fight another day. But the Soviet leader ordered the troops to stay in Kiev, leading to the “greatest single defeat of the war” and the capture of “half a million prisoners” (Conquest, 1991, 240). In the condemning words of Service, Stalin “acted like a military ignoramus, just as he had proved a diplomatic one” (2005, 421). Throughout the war, Stalin would continue to be headstrong in similar ways, often overruling his generals and military intelligence officers, to the detriment of troops on the ground. Though he did improve as the war progressed, his initial blunders and general ego caused significant damage to the Soviet army and population. Despite ultimately defeating the Germans, the USSR suffered “four to eight times” the losses of their Nazi counterparts. In Conquest’s quick summation, the war “might have been won more easily but for [Stalin’s] mistakes both before and during the struggle” (1991, 266).

As was discussed in the failed preparations for the initial Nazi invasion, Machiavelli demands that a leader understand war. Stalin frequently and dangerously overestimated his own mastery of this “art” (Machiavelli, 1988, 58). In doing so, he costs many Soviet lives while also ignoring a key Machiavellian tenet. This was far from the cunning leader that The Prince desired. Yet, to an outside observer, the callousness toward and negligence of the lives of individuals could almost be seen as cruel. With this interpretation, Stalin comes back toward fulfilling Machiavellian expectations. Despite millions of casualties, the Soviet leader ordered his troops to keep fighting. He acted with vice, cruelty and negligence, but more importantly
with sheer force of will. He did what was necessary to “preserve one’s state,” regardless of the effects on his reputation or people (Machiavelli, 1988, 62). He sacrificed lives for the maintenance and power of the state and was victorious, just as Machiavelli would have advised.

In all, Stalin’s military affairs serve as a large deviation from The Prince’s expectations of a cunning, military expert as leader. Instead, Stalin’s military power ultimately comes from his ruthlessness in the defeat of the enemy, even at the astronomical costs to his own soldiers and people. This too, is Machiavellian, and Stalin’s partial adherence to the framework stems largely from his sheer force of will. He wanted to preserve the state and used any means necessary and any lives necessary to reach that end. The result was victory, but at high cost.

**Domestic Affairs**

Stalin’s domestic affairs were largely limited during the war, as much of his attention and energy went in to the actual operations of fighting. Likewise, the home-front was overwhelmingly dedicated to the war effort. However, a key conflict did emerge in domestic policy, and Stalin responded in a tactically Machiavellian fashion, though his strategic analysis was tinged with paranoia rather than cunning.

Stalin’s regime had long been active in the deportation or purging of dissident groups within the Soviet Union. Despite the massive war effort, Stalin decided to continue this aggressive and abusive domestic policy in 1943, focusing his effort on certain nationalities in the Caucuses. Eventually, some two million people were rounded up and sent to labor camps in Siberia and Central Asia. “About a third of them died” within the first few months of initial arrest (Conquest, 1991, 258-9). For the survivors, Stalin assigned nearly 100,000 secret police officers as guardsmen for the camps. In one powerful act, Stalin crushed any perceived resistance
in the region and eliminated the political entities granting any sort of autonomy, further consolidating his rule (Conquest, 1991, 258).

During the war itself, no other act so stands out as exemplary of the ruthless advice of *The Prince*. Obviously, Machiavelli calls on a good leader to eliminate enemies if they cannot be caressed into submission (1988, 10). Operating in a Russian-dominated state, Stalin decided to crush the non-Russian nationalities in the Caucus region, eliminating enemies in order to better control the area, just as the Florentine would have prescribed. In the same vein, Stalin opted to use force when he deemed it necessary to create support for his regime. As Machiavelli phrases the same concept, “one can make them believe by force” (1988, 24). Obviously, force has its drawbacks, often sowing discontent among the population. Yet, Stalin used a Machiavellian framework to avoid that eventuality. The Soviet leader followed the advice that “injuries must be done all together” so that “tasted less, they offend less” (Machiavelli, 1988, 38). He took two million people at once, numbing the effects of each individual arrest with the grand and quick scale of the action. The Florentine would have suggested the same course of action. Naturally, Stalin’s domestic conduct during the war was largely limited, but its few instances offered sharp reminders why Machiavelli and Stalin are often associated with ruthless policies designed to maintain power.

On the other hand, though, the deportation of the Caucus region was an unnecessary move and reflected Stalin’s paranoia about attempts to remove him from power. In the midst of the war, the domestic populations of the Caucus nations were not a strategic priority. Yet, by catering to his fears, Stalin removed 100,000 able-bodied men from the fight against the Germans, instead using them and enormous quantities of resources to imprison his own citizens. These deportations undoubtedly “significantly affected the military effort at the front”
(Conquest, 1991, 259). Machiavelli makes clear that war should be a leader’s sole focus especially in the midst of a conflict, yet in the case of the Caucus region, Stalin was distracted and hindered the Soviet capacity to respond. His unfounded fears hurt the war cause, shifting away from Machiavelli’s desired cunning and military expertise.

Ultimately, Stalin was not a perfect Machiavellian leader. Despite the conflation of his name and ruthlessness, he possessed far less of the cunning demanded by *The Prince*. His grasp of military affairs in particular, left much to be desired, especially in such a large-scale war. However, Machiavelli’s ideal leader was both a fox and a lion. While Stalin may have lacked some of the clever qualities of the fox, he made up for it with ruthlessness and force of will. Stalin was not a strategic or policy genius, but he was incredibly adept at maintaining power and influence, particularly through banishment, imprisonment and execution. This indicated both an awareness depicted in the fox metaphor as well as a capacity to handle enemies through brute force. Overall, though, Stalin’s most Machiavellian attribute may have been his sheer force of will. His willingness to use strength, particularly police and military strength, to impose his will, demonstrated an uncompromising desire to control and maintain the state and his own standing within it. While Stalin as a whole fell short of a Machiavellian ideal, his willingness to hold power through any means matched *The Prince’s* ambition.

**Applied Theory: Churchill**

As with Stalin, Machiavelli’s direct connection and influences on Churchill are unclear. Regardless, though, Churchill acted as a significantly more Machiavellian leader than Stalin in terms of external affairs during the war. In his dealings with military matters and foreign policy,
Churchill was a much more competent and Machiavellian leader than his Soviet counterpart. Where Churchill fell short of *The Prince*’s ideal is in domestic affairs, failing to maintain his own power and support in the waning days of the war. Churchill was Machiavellian insofar as he maintained the security of the state in the face of an existential threat. However, he failed to heed the Florentine’s guidance on the home-front, losing his own power domestically at the close of the war.

Churchill’s initial rise to executive power occurred after the initial outbreak of World War II. Despite nearly forty years in Parliament, Churchill had never held the premiership until May 1940. In a normal political situation, he likely would not have become Prime Minister at all. He was not the leader of his own party, which was in power, nor the leader of the opposition power. Further, assuming a change in leadership, Churchill was “by no means the clear public choice for Prime Minister,” either (Jenkins, 2001, 576). Beyond that, he “was not the choice of the King… the Whitehall establishment… [nor] the choice of the majority party in the House of Commons” (Jenkins, 2001, 588). Yet, he would take power over a government of national unity.

Importantly, Machiavelli recognized fortune and chance’s role in political affairs and history. He also recognized that the best man “adapts his mode of proceedings to the qualities of the times,” preparing for and taking advantage of chance, metaphorically building dams in anticipation for future floods (Machiavelli, 1988, 98-9). In his rise to the premiership, Churchill took advantage of circumstance parlayed with his long career of public service. He was the right man for the right time. On domestic, foreign and military fronts, Churchill seized the moment. Ultimately, in defending Great Britain against Nazi forces, he would employ many Machiavellian tactics with great vigor and measured success.
When Churchill took the reins of the newly formed government of national unity, Europe had been at war for nearly a year. The German blitzkrieg on France was days old when he assumed the mantle of the “champion of the nation in the eyes of both the public and the press” (Jenkins, 2001, 588). His first and most pressing foreign affairs concern were relations with the distressed France. More directly, Churchill had to handle the potential landmine of a separate French ceasefire with the Nazi attackers, which would leave Britain alone in the Western European theater. Churchill desperately wanted France to continue to fight against Germany, regardless of the increasingly dire situation. However, with a powerful German breakthrough splitting the Allied lines, eventual French defeat seemed likely. By mid-June, the French leadership was looking to sue for a separate peace. In a last desperate attempt, Churchill, his cabinet, and a number of key French leaders, including Charles de Gaulle, proposed the radical move of “amalgamating the British and French states,” in order to fully bond their union and keep the French fighting, especially at sea and in North Africa (Jenkins, 2001, 619). The motion failed in the French cabinet, and following the French prime minister’s resignation, the new French cabinet sued for armistice terms with Germany.

Churchill’s strategy here, radical tactics aside, is largely Machiavellian. The Englishman’s driving theme is that France cannot remove itself from the conflict. As The Prince advises, a leader and a state should not remain neutral in a conflict (1988, 89). However, France’s decision to sue for a ceasefire took it out of the direct struggle between Nazi Germany and the rest of Europe. France was an ally of Britain and an extension of British power and influence; thus, Churchill vehemently opposed this move toward neutrality. Moreover, Churchill feared the resources of a collaborationist government in France working with Germany, violating
the Machiavellian tenet of associating with more powerful states (Machiavelli, 1988, 91). France’s actions directly violated *The Prince*, and as the closest ally of the French, Churchill was strongly opposed to this course of action. He understood that ceasefire and acquiescence would only strengthen Germany. Militarily and realistically, the British needed an active and armed France for their own protection, too. Without a French distraction, German forces could turn their attention to the British Isles. Churchill’s military acumen and understanding of the situation, then, also followed a Machiavellian logic. The Florentine wanted a leader to “make himself head and defender of the neighboring lesser powers” (1988, 11). While France was not necessarily a lesser power, the sentiment still mattered, as Machiavelli encouraged defense of neighbors for both loyalty and buffer effects. Churchill needed a fighting and allied France in order to maintain that buffer. His efforts to keep France in the war followed a clear Machiavellian logic.

Churchill’s own decision for Britain to remain in the war and continue fighting alone also was clearly Machiavellian. At the time of the French ceasefire, no other major powers remained to oppose Germany save Great Britain. By the June of 1940, Italy was a German ally, Hitler and Stalin had signed a non-aggression pact, and the United States remained a year and half away from declaring war. However, despite these obstacles and a realistic path toward a negotiated peace, the Prime Minister remained adamant with his long held stance: “Whatever the French did, we would continue to fight to the last” (qtd. in Jenkins, 2001, 594).

At the very start of his premiership, Churchill delivered some of his most well-known and effective war-time rhetoric, clearly outlining his willingness to continue the fight. He offered the nation and the world his “blood, toil, tears and sweat” (qtd. in Jenkins, 2001, 591). The Prime Minister had only one aim: “It is victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory,
however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival” (qtd. in Jenkins, 2001, 591). These words, and others, would serve as rallying cry during the later Battle of Britain. With his words, Churchill mimicked a Machiavellian line of thought, understanding the importance of maintaining political sovereignty, regardless of the potential costs.

As with his admonishment of the French ceasefire, Churchill understood that he could not remain neutral in the conflict. The Machiavellian justification was similar to what Churchill might have said. Quoting a Roman, *The Prince* claims that, as a neutral party, “without thanks, without honor, [the neutral party] will be the prize of the victor” (1988, 90). Churchill agreed, knowing that if he sued for peace in 1940, he would eventually have been Hitler’s prize. Perhaps most importantly, Churchill understood the stakes of the historical moment, which aligned well with the Florentine’s major theme. The central thesis of *The Prince* is Machiavelli’s depiction of how states, in his case principalities, are to be “governed and maintained” (1988, 6). Survival is the most important. Nothing would be less Machiavellian than actions leading to the ultimate demise of the state. Churchill, quite rightly, considered the war with Germany to be a matter of survival (Neillands, 2003, 147). Only continued fighting gave Britain a chance at national survival. So, Churchill continued to fight, as Machiavelli would have advised.

While remaining in the war was a foreign affairs decision, it had an important domestic component. Just as members of the French cabinet had considered and ultimately sued for peace, likewise some members of the British government were somewhat open to negotiating a peace with Germany. The most important potential agitator for appeasement and peace was Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary of Churchill’s new cabinet. He wanted “to preserve as much as he could of the England he knew and loved,” perhaps hoping for a neutral independence beyond the channel, leaving Europe to Germany’s control (Jenkins, 2001, 600). Halifax rightly questioned if
Great Britain had the resources to withstand an assault from Nazi attackers. Churchill handled the situation skillfully, and frankly, in a way Machiavelli would have counselled.

First, Churchill recognized the fragility of the political situation. If Halifax went public about his desire to sue for peace, along with another cabinet ally, likely the recently unseated Chamberlin, Churchill’s still novel and tenuous power would have been largely undermined. Yet Churchill was clever and alert, playing Machiavelli’s fox, “recogniz[ing] snares” (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). He knew the present risks and acted accordingly to mitigate them. He did this through Machiavellian means, too. Churchill remained clever and worked through three days of argumentation to convince Halifax and Neville Chamberlin, the former Prime Minister who still commanded massive respect in the party, that war was the only logical course. Where logos may have failed, Churchill also turned to ethos, following the Machiavellian advice to have “greatness, spiritedness, gravity and strength” in a leader’s actions (1998, 72). He gave a call to arms to his cabinet, stating, “if this long island story of ours is to end at last, let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground” (qtd. in Jenkins, 2001, 608).

Moreover, he cleverly invited a larger cabinet group to discuss war, echoing this theme of bravery and diction of courage in front of other government officials not usually privy to those discussions. Churchill drew hearty praise from those other government officials, demonstrating the clear support for his position to Halifax. With Churchill’s persistence and cleverness, Halifax backed down and Chamberlin sided with the new Prime Minister (Jenkins, 2001, 609).

Following a seeming Machiavellian script, Churchill kept Britain in the war.

From then on, most of Churchill’s external energies turned to the waging of war and the recruitment of allies. Later sections will discuss Churchill’s military affairs and more importantly his dealings with other Allied powers, but his actions in those early days of his premiership
cannot go unnoticed. In his dealings with France and Germany over potential peace negotiations, Churchill showed a political aptitude reminiscent of a Machiavellian leader. The Briton was clever and resolute in his interactions and decisions, and his remaining fortitude throughout the war would guide his foreign affairs toward a Machiavellian frame.

Military Affairs

When Churchill came to power, he already had extensive experience in military affairs, dating back to the Boer Wars in South Africa (Neillands, 2003, 67). In the nascent stages of WWII, he also had been serving in the War Cabinet as head of the British Navy (Jenkins, 2001, 552). When he became Prime Minister, Churchill continued to act with experience and largely remained in line with Machiavellian logic in his military actions and attitudes.

Churchill’s first major conflict involved the evacuation of Dunkirk. In the late days of May, the Belgian government and army capitulated, leaving the German army bearing down on French and British forces stationed in Northern France. With the ineffective French likely to put up little resistance, the British forces made for the sea in an attempt to get across the English Channel and back to England before being captured or killed. In a remarkable series of events, the British managed to return a vast majority of their forces across the Channel, though they did abandon most of their military equipment on the beaches of Dunkirk. In all, some 335,000 soldiers escaped France at Dunkirk, about a third of whom were French. The escape was instrumental in allowing Britain and some Allies in exile to continue resisting German expansion (Jenkins, 2001, 596).

Churchill’s decision to flee and defend British soil was both a politically expedient and Machiavellian move. Bluntly, Churchill abandoned France, an ally, leaving the nation all but
doomed to German capture. While he did make efforts to placate the French government, notably with the evacuation of substantial French troops, Churchill ultimately made a calculated decision to leave France. He decided that continuing the fight from the ocean-encased British Isles was the best, if only, option. Likely, Machiavelli would have applauded Churchill’s choices. First, Machiavelli advises his leaders to “carry on great enterprises” (1988, 87). Daring military endeavors give leaders repute among the population and garner additional support for future action. A last-minute escape across the English Channel was of both “hard practical importance… [and] even greater psychological importance” (Jenkins, 2001, 597). Churchill had managed to secure Britain against any immediate amphibious invasion while also rallying the people. Of greater Machiavellian tone, though, was the Prime Minister’s choice to abandon the defense of France altogether. Yet, understanding the likely insurmountable odds of holding off the invading Nazi forces, Churchill followed Machiavellian strategy: “a prudent lord… cannot observe faith…when such observance turns against him” (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). The situation became dire, and Britain could no longer keep its mutual defense pact with France. Instead, Churchill fell back to fight another day and continue the war effort. While this retreat undoubtedly allowed Allies to continue the war effort and likely had a hand in ultimate French liberation, the initial breaking of French faith was an understandable, but Machiavellian move.

With the continent overrun shortly after, the Battle of Britain began in the late summer of 1940. German bomber attacks on major British cities became regular, and British air defenses sought to protect civilians, military and industry from harm. While not a siege in a traditional sense, the Battle was similar in tone and strategic effect. Britain was surrounded, and Germany attempted to break down the defenses and morale of the British in order to launch a proper invasion. Ultimately, the Battle was a draw, with German forces neither decimating Britain, nor
being destroyed themselves (Neillands, 2003, 154). Yet the fighting would prove “one of the most decisive draws in history,” staving off a German invasion and maintaining active Allied resistance in the war (Jenkins, 2001, 630). Churchill’s role throughout the air campaign mirrored the Machiavellian advice given to a leader under siege.

In *The Prince*, the Florentine urges resolute leadership during a siege, particularly “by giving hope to his subjects...[and] fear of the enemy’s cruelty” (1988, 44). Churchill’s rhetoric and public actions stand as testaments to this hope under siege and demonization of the Nazi enemy. In perhaps his most famous speech, he referred to the battle as necessary to “the survival of Christian civilization” in the face of “the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister... by the lights of a perverted science.” In the face of this enemy, he called on Britons to stand up for “their finest hour” (Jenkins, 2001, 621). The Prime Minster backed up his soaring rhetoric with public action. He intentionally made very public visits to sites affected by bombings throughout London, and notably kept the government in the city despite the bomb threats. As Machiavelli would have wanted, Churchill maintained a hopeful and strong public image, garnering support and sustained morale from the citizenry. His character and actions during siege matched a Machiavellian framework well. His capacity to keep Britain intact and fighting during the prolonged siege proved of immense strategic importance, too. German troops and resources had to remain on the Western Front, siphoning resources from the attack on Russia, while the US ultimately had a significantly safer launch point from which to invade North Africa and France. Churchill’s actions under siege helped preserve the war effort.

After the eventual entry of the US into the war, Britain and its allies began to shift to offensive strategies in the Western European theater. Much of the decision making was shared jointly with the American leadership, so Churchill’s individual role was diminished. Thus, this
thesis will mainly discuss the give and take in Western Allied strategy in the later Roosevelt and Allied Relations section. However, some of Churchill’s Machiavellian thinking, if not his execution, was evident in his stances on how to conduct the war effort. Like the other leaders throughout the war, Churchill had advocated for opening a second front in the Atlantic theater. The major point of contention was where that front should be and when attacking should commence. Churchill agreed largely with initial landings in North Africa with Operation Torch and strongly pushed for further attacks in the Mediterranean through Sicily and then the Italian peninsula (Jenkins, 2001, 704).

Here, Churchill’s military actions mirrored Machiavellian advice. While everyone recognized the need for a second front, Churchill, along with Roosevelt, understood the importance of quick, symbolic victories. Strategically, North Africa was worth less than Europe. However, after years of defensive maneuvers, rather than waiting for sufficient forces to invade France, Churchill opted against waiting for further build-up for any strike. Instead, the attack on North Africa constituted a “great enterprise,” that Machiavelli claimed carried esteem, loyalty and high morale with the people (1988, 87). As at Dunkirk, Churchill earned a symbolic victory, turning around years of defensive maneuvering and stalemate. While the German defenses had not been particularly robust in North Africa, the invasion did have some military ramifications, particularly as a launching point for an invasion of Italy. After the successful invasion of Sicily, the US and British forces jointly pushed onto the Italian mainland and towards Rome (Jenkins, 2001, 704-13).

Throughout this process, Churchill recognized the geopolitical peril for Britain in the Allied camp. While the US and Russia pushed for an invasion of France, Churchill continued to advocate for a push up through Italy and into occupied German territory. This Mediterranean
strategy reflected Churchill’s Machiavellian thought process. *The Prince* warns that a leader “must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself so as to attack others, except when necessity presses” (1988, 91). In the face of a rampant Germany, Churchill obviously had no choice but to ally with the more powerful US and USSR. However, as the war came closer and closer to an end, Churchill began to think more and more of the end game. In particular, he worried about the advance of Russia into the European sphere of influence. His urging to put resources into the Italian campaign with hopes of “push[ing] north-east as far as possible and pre-empt[ing] the arrival of the Russians in Vienna” reflected his wariness and geopolitical awareness (Jenkins, 2001, 738). Machiavelli also would have warned of an increasingly powerful and unrestrained Soviet Union. However, Churchill’s fears were not translated into action. Churchill acquiesced to the American and Soviet insistence of opening a front in Normandy, and Operation Overlord would dominate Western Allied resources at the expense of hasty progress in Italy (Jenkins, 2001, 730).

Ultimately, though, the Allied offensive in France would prove successful and the continued push into Germany would bring about the conclusion of the war. Churchill’s military choices and expertise certainly were related to that outcome. His military understanding and actions followed along a remarkably Machiavellian train of thought, especially during the initial stages of the war on the Western Front. Interestingly, though, Churchill’s military successes against the Germans weakened Britain’s standing in the world relative to its allies. While Churchill was the “crucial center” for the Allies, especially in formation, the involvement of the US and the USSR led to Britain’s “relative decline” (Jenkins, 2001, 704). Churchill did not have a choice in allying against Germany, but the geopolitical shift and decline of British power is an unfortunate side effect for Churchill’s rule. The decreasing power of the British state is the
perhaps the most glaring aberration from Machiavelli’s framework during Churchill’s foreign and military policy tenure.

**Domestic Affairs**

Domestically, Churchill also had declining power as the war progressed, and failed to solidify his rule throughout the conflict. His actions on the home-front in the political sphere seemed to fall short of a Machiavellian ideal as Churchill was removed from office before the war’s conclusion. His initial actions in unifying the government and creating a strong cabinet of advisors, notwithstanding, Churchill’s ultimate dismissal from power departed from the Machiavellian framework.

Interestingly, Churchill’s tenure as Prime Minister began with a strong exhibition of Machiavellian norms. First, he took control over a government of national unity, creating a coalition government between the Labour and Conservative parties (Jenkins, 2001, 586). Machiavelli urged his leaders to be clever and wary, especially in relation to figures who would internally undermine a leader’s power (1988, 69). Here, Churchill was clearly aware of the threat to his ruling stability and to the nation’s stability if Labour were to be left out of power. By including the opposition, he managed to “caress” a potential political enemy, creating dependence and loyalty instead of hostility (Machiavelli, 1988, 10). His initial setup of government followed sound Machiavellian strategy.

His further designation of cabinet level positions mirrored Machiavellian advice, too. The Florentine wanted a “prudent prince” to “choos[e] wise men in his state” and be “a patient listener to the truth” (1988, 94-5). Churchill followed this statement in his cabinet appointees, selecting a strong team of advisors, that were both experienced and powerful (Jenkins, 2001,
Machiavelli wanted wisdom in a group of advisors, but also wanted wariness from the prince. Good advisors gave good advice, but the mere position of advisor also bound the advisor to the leader. Binding the fates of the leader and the advisor would theoretically prevent any power grabs. By including powerful politicians, like the recently deposed Chamberlin, in high cabinet positions, Churchill put a check on potential ambitions to overtake his premiership role. Moreover, he remained diligent in the first year of potential challenges to his authority. Notably, after the serious debate over suing for peace with Halifax, Churchill had him transferred to the United States as an ambassador (Neillands, 2003, 147). Machiavelli would have agreed with the decision to push out a potential rival for power, especially when they were arguing for different policies.

However, Churchill largely neglected domestic rivals and politics after his first year, growing ever more involved in the war effort. This ignorance cost him the premiership in the long run. Initial dissatisfaction most notably came to head during the censure debate of July 1942. Parliament held two days of hearings to criticize Churchill’s running of the war effort. While Churchill did “repulse the strongest parliamentary challenge to his five years of wartime leadership,” worse electoral challenges would come down the road (Jenkins, 2001, 698).

Toward the end of the war, Atlee and other labor members began to more publicly and directly criticize Churchill’s actions. At the same time, partisanship grew, fed in part by Churchill himself, who had to begin campaigning in earnest in for the June 1945 general elections (Jenkins, 2001, 789-92). Yet for various reasons, Churchill’s message rang hollow in Great Britain. Despite victory in Europe, Churchill and his party lost power in Parliament during the closing months of the war (Jenkins, 2001, 797). The resounding defeat was decidedly not Machiavellian in nature.
During his premiership, Churchill had focused overwhelmingly on the war effort, and to great effect. However, he neglected his domestic audience. Despite some initial indications of dissatisfaction, Churchill did not properly tap into the sentiments of the disaffected. Notably, Machiavelli urges leaders to “take account of those [diverse] communities” in a state and to even meet with them (1988, 91). Churchill did not effectively understand or meet the needs of his UK constituents. His military exploits did not prove powerful enough to keep him and his party in power. Churchill acted remarkably Machiavellian in his conduct of the war, astutely relying on his expertise and advisors to do what was necessary for Britain. However, a state has external and internal relations, and Churchill did not prepare properly to maintain authority in the domestic sphere. In a seemingly Machiavellian way, chance mixed with preparation threw Churchill into power, and the famous Briton’s mixed use of Machiavellian tendencies kept Britain intact, but not Churchill’s premiership.

**Applied Theory: Roosevelt**

Franklin D. Roosevelt served longer than any President in US history, and his leadership during the Second World War stands out as a remarkably defining period in the nation’s story. Without a doubt, his decisions and actions in the buildup to the American entry to the conflict and his choices following the declaration of war were instrumental to an ultimate Allied victory. The purpose of this thesis, though, is to ascertain whether those leadership decisions followed the theoretical advice of Machiavelli in *The Prince*.

Based on his participation in foreign, military and domestic affairs, Roosevelt’s decisions reflected largely Machiavellian choices. With a few glaring exceptions, Roosevelt seemed to
follow Machiavellian tendencies. His preparations for a Japanese attack in the Pacific departed from *The Prince’s* framework. Further, his handling of the internment of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast probably was unnecessarily paranoid, not Machiavellian, much like Stalin’s imprisonment of members of the Caucus region during the war. Finally, in his negotiations with Stalin, Roosevelt seemed truly lacking as a Machiavellian leader, though that will be discussed in a later section. Overall, though, the President acted largely as a Machiavellian prince might if put in charge of the American executive.

**Foreign Affairs**

In the buildup to full scale conflict in Europe and following the German invasion of Poland, FDR handled US foreign affairs with a delicate, clever and Machiavellian expertise. The notable case of ignorance toward Japanese relations proved the largest exception to his execution of Machiavellian principles. Despite Machiavelli’s explicit call against neutrality in war, Roosevelt’s slow entry into armed conflict actually proved an astute balancing of domestic and foreign constituencies. His foreign policy dealings up to his later interactions with Stalin marked a close adherence to *The Prince*.

As is well known, FDR kept the United States out of World War II until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Even as aggression mounted in Europe, “Roosevelt swam with the isolationist tide” (Smith, 2007, 418). Following World War I and the Great Depression, the American public and press overwhelmingly supported remaining neutral and isolated from overseas conflicts. The President’s own attitudes were decidedly more internationalist as both Germany and Japan began territorial acquisitions, promoting the need for involvement short of war. In late 1937, Roosevelt delivered his “Quarantine” Speech, where he created an analogy
that war was like the spreading of a “physical disease” or “a contagion,” thus necessitating the quarantining of both the sick patient and the spread of war. The shift was a dud in public opinion, though, as FDR drily surmised in his quip, “It’s a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead–and to find no one there” (qtd. in Smith, 2007, 419). As the threat of violence escalated, though, Roosevelt continued to escalate his rhetoric and political maneuvering. His slow coalition building would eventually create a sustained support for some level of American involvement, which is discussed in more depth in the domestic affairs section.

In the broadest political sense, though, Roosevelt wanted to support the Allied cause short of going to war, staying in line with public opinion in mid-1941 that showed 81% in opposition to entry to war. His neutrality was apparent in that he was “not willing to fire the first shot” (Smith, 2007, 492).

On its face, this resistance to the war violates Machiavellian principles. *The Prince* holds that a leader should “disclose himself in support of someone against another” and “wage open war” (89). Roosevelt steadfastly refused to declare open war until the attack on Pearl Harbor. While he would publicly denounce Japanese, Italian and German aggressions, he would not engage US troops directly in combat. As a foreign policy choice, this did not follow Machiavellian thought. His call for open war is explicit, and anything less breeds distrust from potential allies and disrespect from potential victors. Yet the President could not act unilaterally in the US system. When considering domestic constraints, FDR actually proved quite Machiavellian in his slow buildup of support for Allied efforts. The President could not maintain power nor gain support from Congress or the public for a war effort. He had to slowly move the needle. Roosevelt used the metaphorical cleverness of the fox “to recognize snares” posed by domestic and popular opposition (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). Through steady expansion of military
support, the President eased resistance to foreign entanglement, retained domestic political authority and supported the war effort.

In a larger sense, Roosevelt was only truly neutral in his restraint of dedicating American lives for the cause, that element of waging open war. Instead, the US waged an economic and material war. In terms of military and industrial support, the US would become, in the President’s terms, “the arsenal of democracy” (Smith, 2007, 486). When Germany invaded Poland, declarations of war from Britain and France quickly followed. After the passage of Neutrality Acts earlier in the 1930s, the new laws prevented the US sale of arms to the new belligerents (Smith, 2007, 436). Roosevelt could not supply aid to the Allies by law. As a result, he set out to change the law, calling for a special session of Congress. While he could not get a repeal of the Neutrality Acts, FDR did manage to arrange a “cash-and-carry” basis for weapons sales. European powers, in this case the Allies, could purchase weapons provided that they offered payment up front and their own transport of supplies back to Europe (Smith, 2007, 438-41). The brokering of this compromise allowed appeasement for both domestic and foreign audiences. The Allies had arms and the American public had peace.

Meanwhile, through 1939 and 1940, Britain suffered serious attacks at sea from German U-boats. By summer 1940, the island nation was in a position where it likely could not defend its trade routes and protect against invasion simultaneously. Britain needed destroyers which the US had in ample reserve. With the Neutrality Acts in place, though, a large transfer of ships was impossible by law. Roosevelt again found a way, though. Through a number of legal loopholes, Roosevelt was able to exchange fifty World War I-era destroyers to Britain in exchange for 99-year leases on eight of their Western Hemisphere naval bases (Smith, 2007, 469-71). With clever
maneuvering, Roosevelt was able to resupply British defenses while strengthening America’s military capacity closer to home.

This trend of military aid continued from 1939 to late-1940, as Britain spent extensively on supplies from the US. Yet, as 1940 drew to a close, cash-and-carry “had drained the British treasury of its dollar reserves;” soon, the British would have no capacity with which to buy the new weapons and material necessary to resisting Germany (Smith, 2007, 482). As with cash-and-carry, Roosevelt acted decisively, calling for a new policy: Lend-Lease. He introduced the concept through a simple analogy comparing the lending of weaponry to a nation at war to the lending of a garden hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire. FDR chided, “I don’t say to him, ‘Neighbor, my garden hose cost me fifteen dollars.’” In the end, after significant public rhetoric and gathering of political allies, Roosevelt got the Lend-Lease measure to pass. Congress authorized $7 billion in military aid for Britain. Moreover, in this process, Roosevelt moved farther and farther from neutrality, explicitly saying that the act marks “the end of compromise with tyranny” (Smith, 2007, 485-90). Lend-Lease marked an unambiguous support of the Allied war effort short of putting American troops on the ground. Eventually, the program was extended to supply the Soviet Union with supplies following the German betrayal of Stalin (Smith, 2007, 498).

As before, Roosevelt’s actions here are neutral and in violation of Machiavellian principles on the surface, but are actually very in line with The Prince when accounting for the domestic constraints of a democratic leader. Through his negotiations with Congress and the American public, Roosevelt was able to get substantial, non-rhetorical support to Allied forces resisting Germany directly. He could not have unilaterally declared war on Germany, but he was capable of giving resources to Britain and later Russia to effectively wage war. In doing so, he
actually fulfilled the Machiavellian tenet of becoming the “defender of the neighboring lesser powers” (Machiavelli, 1988, 11). While Great Britain and the USSR were by no means weak, they lacked the industrial and military production capacity of the United States. The American direct aid allowed those nations to continue the war while simultaneously giving Roosevelt and the US more influence in those foreign countries. Through material and economic support and defense, Roosevelt strengthen an alliance and buffer against a rampant Germany. He cleverly balanced the needs of the war effort with the demands of the American public, using the US war machine to fight Germany, but using Russian and British lives instead. Machiavelli likely would have advised the same course of action.

In European relations, Roosevelt seemingly followed Machiavellian practice overwhelmingly. However, the same could not be said for his dealings with Japan in the Pacific. Roosevelt’s general preparations for war and his focus on Europe left a blindspot in regard to Japan. Simply, “the deteriorating situation in the Pacific received little attention” (Smith, 2007, 506). As Japan expanded territorially through Asia, FDR opted to act in retaliation, issuing a freeze on Japanese assets in July of 1941. This served as a “de facto embargo that snuffed out Japan’s access to petroleum” (Smith, 2007, 517). Naturally, this increased animosity between the US and Japan, though the Japanese Prime Minster “desperately sought to prevent war” and began to negotiate with the US. Joseph Grew, the ambassador to Japan, was confident that an acceptable agreement could take place. Yet, in this time, the President largely did not pay attention to Japan, nor did he understand the impacts of his embargo decision. Instead, FDR largely ignored his ambassador’s advice, leaving more hawkish cabinet members in charge of the negotiation instead. When those failed, the Japanese Prime Minister stepped down and was replaced by the War Minister, hastening Japan toward aggression. In fact, Ambassador Grew
emphasized that with the economic pressure of the embargo, Japan was in a “do-or-die” situation and that with the deterioration of relations, war was “not only possible, but probable” (Smith, 2007, 522-4). Yet, even with a proposal for a cooling off period put on the table, Roosevelt ignored the direness of the situation, and allowed the negotiations to end, making war imminent.

Roosevelt’s reasoning for acting in such a haphazard way toward a potential foe remains confusing for historians: “the subject of speculation,” in the words of scholars Langer and Gleason (qtd in Smith, 2007, 525). Concerning the entire breakdown of American-Japanese relations over the second-half of 1941, Smith contends that Roosevelt was simply “too consumed by the war in Europe,” giving “the Far East too little attention,” with racism and Euro-centrism also playing a role (2007, 522). During the initial oil embargo, Roosevelt was largely absent from the decision-making processes. The same detachment marked the later negotiations in late November, 1941 (Dallek, 1995, 254; Smith, 2007, 529). In his relations with Japan, Roosevelt’s actions profoundly depart from Machiavellian ideals. A leader must be concerned with the protection of his state, yet Roosevelt pushed the US toward a war that could potentially have been avoided or delayed. With resources pouring into Europe, the US could ill-afford to start a two-front war in the under-manned Pacific. Yes, Japan was violating tenets of international law, and Roosevelt had denounced those practices. However, the President haphazardly issued aggressive sanctions without analyzing their full repercussions and even as late as November 1941 could have still negotiated for a cooling-down period in order to buy time for military preparedness. Yet, Roosevelt did not, deviating from Machiavellian tactics. The Prince argues that “one should not care about incurring fame of those vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state” (1988, 62). While negotiating with an expansionist, militaristic, imperial state was antithetical to Roosevelt’s democratic morals, the pragmatic effects might have been substantial.
Instead of following the Machiavellian path, though, the President largely ignored the problem he helped amplify.

This abdication of awareness toward Japan marked Roosevelt’s largest foreign policy blunder in the years prior to Pearl Harbor. Moreover, the blunder and breakdown of relations almost directly led to Pearl Harbor. It is impossible to determine if war with Japan could have been prevented through better diplomacy, but Roosevelt’s actions undoubtedly accelerated the start of the war. This oversight in the defense of the country did not follow Machiavellian principles. However, on the whole, Roosevelt did remarkably well to negotiate the pulls of domestic and foreign constituencies. In the build-up to the war, the President managed to keep domestic support and morale high while also vigorously supporting the Allied war effort. The balancing act was as clever as Machiavelli’s fox.

Military Affairs

As in foreign affairs, Roosevelt proved quite adherent to Machiavellian principles in his handling of military affairs. The military buildup, the selection of leadership and execution of strategic goals largely aligned with The Prince’s framework. Again, Roosevelt’s greatest weakness in military affairs involved the buildup to war in the Pacific. Largely, though, those decisions fell on subordinates, whom Roosevelt quickly replaced. Overall, though, Roosevelt followed the Florentine’s tenet of focusing greatly on the art of war.

In the buildup to Nazi aggression, and even after outright war in Europe, Roosevelt painstakingly worked to strengthen the American military. His military preparation was broad and varied, and reportedly, the president “became consumed with defense and foreign policy” in the late fall of 1938 (Smith, 2007, 429). First, he pushed to expand US airpower, looking to
contain Hitler, and Roosevelt called for “five thousand warplanes and the capacity to produce ten thousand more within the next few months” (qtd. in Smith, 2007, 428). After the outright outbreak of hostilities in France in May 1940, Roosevelt stood before Congress and asked for further increased military production to the tune of a $1.2 billion outlay, which would cover a near ten-fold increase in plane production and modernization of the Army and Navy. A month later, he asked for another $1.9 billion. Over the course of the next year, Congress, at Roosevelt’s urging, had appropriated $37.3 billion for defense alone, “a figure roughly four times the entire federal budget of 1939” (Smith, 2007, 446). The massive increase in technical and industrial production was soon matched by an increase in manpower, too. In August, 1940, Roosevelt threw his support behind a peace-time draft. With his backing, the bill would eventually pass later in the month, and by mid-1941, the Army had grown from less than 200,000 men in 1939 to over 1.4 million (Smith, 2007, 467). However, perhaps Roosevelt’s most important decision before America’s entry into the war involved military leadership. The President changed command of the Army, handing the Chief of Staff role to George C. Marshall. Marshall was not the obvious choice, 34th on the list of seniority and a graduate of VMI, not West Point. Yet, his leadership would prove essential to the military’s success throughout the conflict and beyond (Smith, 2007, 432-3).

These preparations and devotion to defense put Roosevelt overwhelmingly in-line with Machiavellian tactics on military matters. First and foremost, the Florentine argues that “a wise prince should… never remain idle in peaceful times” (1988, 60). Even though the US was not technically at war, Roosevelt spent his energy, and his budget, on defense. Recognizing threats to the state, Roosevelt moved to defend it with unprecedented spending and action. The peacetime draft, in particular, was a significant deviation from American tradition and required delicate
politicking by the president. He worked privately with a citizens’ framing group to pitch the draft to the public; he allowed his cabinet leaders to speak strongly in favor of it, and eventually he came out publicly in support as well (Smith, 2007, 464-6). Despite peace, Roosevelt prepared for war. His appointment of Marshall to the Chief of Staff of the Army, too, aligned with Machiavellian advice, reflecting the need for a leader to “choos[e] wise men in his state” (Machiavelli, 1988, 94). Marshall, by all accounts, was an exceptional commander, the eventual “organizer of victory” in Winston Churchill’s estimation (Morrow, 1997, 5). Marshall was not the obvious choice by seniority, but he was the correct choice for Roosevelt under the guidelines of astute leadership required by The Prince.

Roosevelt made a number of other key military appointments against the grain of orthodoxy, notably Dwight D. Eisenhower as the supreme commander in Europe and Douglas MacArthur to the command in the Pacific, as well as Chester Nimitz in charge of the Pacific fleet. Eisenhower was 252nd on Army lists before the North African invasion, MacArthur had detractors in the War Department and Nimitz lacked enthusiastic support of senior admirals. Yet Roosevelt had an eye for talented advisors and, following the appointment of Eisenhower, the president largely stayed out of the immediate running of military affairs, leaving his generals to do their work (Smith, 2007, 598).

The President’s delegation of military authority to largely his generals’ discretion has an ambiguous parallel in the framework of The Prince. Literally, the text reads that “a prince should have no other object…but that of war and its orders and disciplines,” implying direct and consistent interactions and control over military affairs (1988, 58). However, Roosevelt did largely the opposite, choosing not to “second-guess or micromanage the military,” rather giving his hand-picked commanders extreme latitude to do what they thought was best (Smith, 2007,
On its face, this seems to violate Machiavelli’s insistence for a leader to focus on little but war. Certainly, Roosevelt was much more hands-off in military affairs than either Churchill or Stalin.

In a Renaissance context of Machiavelli’s writing, this stance would have been problematic. In a modern context, though, the apparatus of both the state and the military were significantly more complex than Machiavelli could have imagined. By appointing the best military commanders and remaining hands-off, Roosevelt was likely following the spirit of Machiavelli’s principle. The President could not realistically be a complete military expert and occupy his whole efforts with the tactical choices of the war. Whereas Stalin meddled ineffectively with military tactics, often overruling his generals, Roosevelt let his experts use their expertise. Machiavelli recognizes that a leader should “choos[e] wise men in his state” and heed their advice when correct (1998, 94). In his appointment of particular commanders, rather than the top-ranking officials, Roosevelt intentionally selected the wise men in his state to advise him. He used their expertise in military affairs as an extension of his own. Machiavelli would likely approve of such intelligence.

Following the “day of infamy,” the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Roosevelt did make a few important and direct military interventions, though (Dallek, 1995, 312). First, alongside Churchill, he advocated for opening up a new front as soon as possible against Germany. While Marshall and the other generals wanted to conserve resources for a cross-channel invasion into France, which would have likely occurred in 1943, Roosevelt wanted more immediate action, pushing for an attack on German-held North Africa. Despite “robust objections of the American joint chiefs,” the President ordered Operation Torch to proceed (Smith, 2007, 561). The mission’s later success would vindicate Roosevelt’s decision.
As Marshall admitted in retrospect, “We failed to see that the leader in a democracy has to keep the people entertained...the people demand action. We couldn’t wait to be completely ready” (qtd. in Smith, 2007, 561). Roosevelt made other key and controversial decisions, notably his transfer of ships and naval aircraft from the Pacific to the Atlantic theater in order to halt the German U-boat campaign. He again went against the advice of his Joint Chiefs of Staff, but was again vindicated with the forced withdrawal of the German submarine fleet from the North Atlantic and the subsequent security of American and British shipping lanes (Smith, 2007, 571; Dalek, 1995, 286).

These decisions reflect a remarkably analogous adherence to the framework of *The Prince*. First and foremost, Machiavelli wanted his leaders to be military experts. Roosevelt’s choices to overrule his commanders demonstrated his focus on the “art... of war and its orders and disciplines” (Machiavelli, 1998, 58). Roosevelt understood the broader strategic necessities of the war better than his generals. He recognized the need to engage quickly with Germany and to protect Atlantic shipping lanes. At a base military level, attacking North Africa was a sideshow of less strategic importance than continental Europe. However, Roosevelt acted with a Machiavellian understanding that he had to please the public. Marshall’s quip about keeping the people “entertained” mirrors two sentiments espoused in *The Prince*. Namely, Machiavelli holds that a leader should carry on “great enterprises” and “keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles” (1988, 87; 91). The Florentine meant for leaders to keep their citizens occupied with various religious and cultural festivals typical of the Renaissance era. However, this action was done to placate the populace and to garner loyalty to the leader. Marshall recognized similar effects in Roosevelt’s decision to invade North Africa. He had to engage in war as soon as possible to satisfy public opinion, even though North Africa was less valuable strategically than
Europe and took resources away from a future cross-Channel invasion. Roosevelt carried out a literal “great enterprise” in a Machiavellian sense, captivating the US public with a military campaign, demonstrating American ambition and capacity simultaneously (Machiavelli, 1988, 87). The choice to attack earlier on a less important target was a calculated political move, just as *The Price* would suggest.

As a military leader, Roosevelt was remarkably Machiavellian. While somewhat hands-off, his success at selecting capable military commanders mirrored *The Prince’s* importance of selecting strong advisors, especially considering his selections were not orthodox or obvious. Further, when he did occasionally intervene, Roosevelt did so with a broader understanding of the military-political interaction than his military-focused commanders. He used the cunning and expertise of a Machiavellian leader to achieve military success while also satisfying a domestic audience.

**Domestic Affairs**

Perhaps unsurprisingly given his Machiavellian techniques in foreign and military affairs, Roosevelt managed to balance domestic affairs with a largely Machiavellian cunning. His appointments and 1940 and 1944 elections reflect an understanding of how to maintain power and balance competing constituencies. The glaring aberration from Machiavellian decision-making domestically again follows from his relations with Japan, in this case his choice to intern Japanese-Americans on the West Coast. As with Stalin and his jailing of dissidents in the Caucuses, Roosevelt’s internment of Japanese-Americans reflected more paranoia than ruthlessness or cunning. Overall, Roosevelt managed to hold on to domestic power, yet
needlessly and cruelly isolated and removed an entire ethnic group, falsely thinking it would promote stability.

First, following the outbreak of war in Europe and before the US entry into the conflict, Roosevelt was faced with the 1940 election. Unlike any president in US history, Roosevelt had opted to run for a third term in office. It was by no means obvious that he would win. Early polls in October put his opponent, Wendell Willkie, ahead 53% to 47%. However, Roosevelt would ultimately take 55% of the popular vote and win the electoral college, 449 to 82 (Smith, 2007, 475-9). While his success is difficult to attribute to any single action, the President made a few campaigning decisions that undoubtedly aided him. Notably, before the Republican nominating convention, Roosevelt brought two key Republicans into his administration, Henry Stimson and Frank Knox, to head the War and Navy Departments, respectively. This move “exposed the deep fissure in the GOP over foreign policy,” with Stimson and Knox aligning with FDR and his internationalist focus, contrasting the isolationist wing of the Republican party (Smith, 2007, 450). While bringing more aggressive elements to his cabinet, Roosevelt also assured the country publicly at the same time, “your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars,” pitching to the war-wary populous (Smith, 2007, 477). Combined with his other speeches and public stances, Roosevelt convinced the US to elect him to a third term. Shortly after, the President was importantly able to make his electoral opponent, Willkie, his political ally following the election. After meeting with FDR in the Oval Office, Willkie publicly defended Lend-Lease and would help unite Republican support behind Roosevelt’s foreign policy (Smith, 2007, 488-90). By the time of the 1944 election, Roosevelt’s coalition held firm and he won again, defeating Thomas Dewey with 432 to 99 electoral votes (Smith, 2007, 628).
From the start of the war, Roosevelt managed to maintain a powerful grip on domestic politics. While he could not unilaterally force decisions, he was remarkably effective at building a governing coalition and keeping his administration in power. In doing so, Roosevelt followed a Machiavellian framework. *The Prince* argued that a leader should “be on guard against [the great in society]” (1988, 40). In the context of the domestic US, Roosevelt, a staunch Democrat, had enemies in the Republican party who fit the “great” stature. In a Machiavellian sense, he had to be wary of these potential threats to his power. Instead of making new enemies, though, Roosevelt made allies. He brought in powerful Republican military voices to his cabinet in Knox and Stimson, obligating the two GOP stalwarts to his administration. Machiavelli specifically encouraged making the great “obligated in everything to [the prince’s] fortune,” and “mak[ing] use of those who are of good counsel” (1988, 40). Knox and Stimson fit this description perfectly, strengthening Roosevelt’s circle of advisors while weakening power bases from which he could be defeated. Gaining the political and policy support of Willkie followed in the same vein, taking a powerful opponent and making him into an ally. Roosevelt’s maneuvering represents the classic Machiavellian metaphor of being a fox, capable of “recogniz[ing] snares” and using cleverness to avoid them (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). He had strong domestic opposition after eight years of leadership, but managed to gain re-election and continue to build a sizeable coalition regardless.

Broadly, Roosevelt did well to maintain domestic political appeal and control, but in the case of Japanese-Americans, the President erred. In February of 1942, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This order unilaterally ordered West Coast residents of Japanese descent, both first-generation and their children, out of their homes and into internment camps. Over 120,000 people were forcibly removed and held in guarded
camps for the vast majority of the duration of the war, losing most of their property and assets in the process. On its face, Roosevelt issued the order out of “military necessity,” fearing a West Coast invasion by the Japanese, which could then be supported by aid and sabotage of the Japanese descendants in the area. (Smith, 2007, 549-52). However, there was scant evidence that military necessity required the removal and internment of lawful US residents. Multiple military and security experts at the time declared the removal “utterly unwarranted” or “wild, farcical, and fantastic stuff” (qtd. in Smith, 2007, 549). Yet, Roosevelt also heard competing views from public opinion, the press, political delegations in California, and members of the War Department. Ultimately, Roosevelt deferred to his War Department and the Assistant Secretary for domestic security made the decision. The Japanese would be rounded up on the West Coast.

In terms of defense, Roosevelt’s decision was decidedly not Machiavellian and reflected the same racism and ignorance that had led to the accelerated enmity with Japan and lack of preparedness of the Pearl Harbor attack. From a simple military perspective, Roosevelt wasted resources and a potential support in removing Japanese-Americans from the West Coast and guarding them throughout the war period. Machiavelli wanted his leaders to be military experts, and forcibly removing Japanese-Americans took away manpower, money and materials from fighting the Japanese and the Germans. Thus, Roosevelt’s decision to inter the residents of Japanese descents violated the Machiavellian framework. However, once that choice was taken, Roosevelt’s execution closely mirrored The Prince. Throughout the issue, the President did not care for the constitutionality of the forced removal of an ethnic group. While Machiavelli wanted leaders to “appear to have [virtues],” a good leader “should not care about incurring fame of those vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state” (1988, 70; 62). In the US context, the Constitution is a guiding document of political virtue and law. Once FDR made the calculation
that the Japanese-Americans were a threat to the state, however erroneous that decision was, he acted, regardless of vice. He acted in a way that he believed was necessary to “save one’s state,” even if it was unconstitutional and immoral (Machiavelli, 1988, 62). Moreover, he was able to push this new domestic order “by force,” something Machiavelli allows as an acceptable domestic policy (1988, 24). While his decision making was terribly flawed and tinged by racism, paranoia and pandering to public opinion, Roosevelt’s execution of Order 9066 did follow Machiavellian tactics, though it was not a Machiavellian decision.

In all, the domestic assessment of Roosevelt’s tenure reflects political efficacy largely in tune to Machiavellian principles. In terms of maintaining power and building a coalition, Roosevelt survived in office longer than any other US president thanks to cunning and adroit politicking. Even his execution of Japanese internment was ruthlessly Machiavellian, though the choice itself was remarkably flawed and violated The Prince’s imperative to focus on war and state security.

Overall, Roosevelt proved a surprisingly Machiavellian leader. In his foreign, military and domestic affairs, the President demonstrated a clever capacity and awareness of the political balancing act necessary for rule. He created a domestic and foreign coalition that was capable of winning World War II and maintaining power until his death in the spring of 1945. His few aberrations from Machiavellian principles came in his relations with the Japanese and with Stalin. Racism clouded his military judgements of Japan and of Japanese-Americans, leading to accelerated conflict, a lack of preparedness for war and police-state style military internment, none of which expedited Allied victory. In the case of Stalin, he ultimately ceded too much geopolitical ground and helped lay the foundations for the Cold War, as is discussed later. Those
Machiavellian shortcomings did not shroud FDR’s overall stature as leader, though. The President may not have intended it, but his leadership during WWII largely aligned with *The Prince*.

**Applied Theory: Allied Relations**

Unsurprisingly, given their status as Allies, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt interacted throughout the war period. In these interactions, all the leaders demonstrated some Machiavellian traits, but in these negotiations, Stalin most closely mirrored *The Prince*’s framework using cunning and ruthlessness to achieve a vast majority of Soviet goals. While there were a number of key interactions, the most important involved Churchill and Roosevelt’s Atlantic Charter, their Quebec Agreement to share nuclear weapons technology and the two tripartite conferences in Tehran and Yalta in 1943 and 1945 respectively.

As Britain initially went to war with Germany, Churchill desperately wanted American participation in the conflict. His courting of Roosevelt marked a very intentional and successful foreign relations tilt to supply Britain with resources to resist Nazi attacks and ultimately encourage direct American involvement in the war. Roosevelt’s supply of war materials to Britain reflected an American desire, but also an intentional push by the Churchill. Cash and Carry, Lend-Lease and the Destroyer-Land Base deals pushed through Congress by Roosevelt originated with asks from Churchill (Jenkins, 2001, 615).

In this process of asking for aid and alliance from the US, Churchill was forced into a non-Machiavellian decision. *The Prince* clearly states that a good leader “has preferred to lose with his own [arms] than to win with others” (1988, 55). Without a doubt, Churchill was reliant on American arms and supplies to keep up the fight alone against Germany. Moreover,
Machiavelli urges that “a prince must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself so as to attack others, except when necessity presses” (1988, 91). The Atlantic Charter all-but finalized the Anglo-American alliance in the early Fall of 1941. The Charter laid out eight key principles that the US and Britain desired in a post-war world that would eventual become the enduring policy positions of the Western Allies (Smith, 2007, 502). Churchill had clearly tied his ship of state to the Americans. On its face, these decisions marked Churchill as running against the Machiavellian grain. However, the clause “except when necessity presses” defined the Prime Minister’s situation. Without American supplies, Germany would likely have overrun the British Isles. The very survival of Churchill’s state was at stake, so he turned to an alliance to ward off ultimate destruction. While survival vindicated his decision to seek alliance and aid, the UK’s “relative decline” compared to the US and later the USSR in world affairs was the price (Jenkins, 2001, 704).

In all of this, Roosevelt came out looking quite Machiavellian. He protected a “lesser” or declining power in Britain, garnering a loyal and indebted ally (Machiavelli, 1988, 11). He did not remain neutral in a conflict, sending everything but troops to the fight, gaining repute from the international community (Machiavelli, 1988, 89). Finally, he helped dictate the policy for a post-world order that clearly favored the United States via free trade, allowing Americans to later “follow their [economic] interests (Machiavelli, 1988, 91). Intentionally or not, Roosevelt used the desperate situation of the war to improve America’s global standing.

Likewise, Stalin used the war to the Soviet Union’s political advantage. Only in Stalin’s relations to Allied help from the US and Britain did he demonstrate a truly Machiavellian foreign affairs strategy, notably in his use of Lend-Lease and in his policy dominance and trickery at Tehran and Yalta. The Prince urges wariness of powerful Allies, but with the German betrayal
and attack, the Soviets needed aid, just as the British did. The massive import of US supplies and machines helped stem and ultimately turn the German advance. Here is where Stalin’s maneuvering helped expand Soviet power rather than see its relative decline as was the case with Britain. Simply, Stalin was steadfast in his negotiating positions and ruthless in his tactics, first at Tehran and then at Yalta. At Tehran, he wanted a promptly opened cross-channel invasion and received promises for a May 1944 date. He wanted expanded Soviet territory in Poland and received assurances of a new border. Moreover, to keep updates on Roosevelt, Stalin “bugged FDR’s suite and knew the details of every conversation” (Smith, 2007, 595). Stalin knew what was happening, and more importantly, as a member of the British contingent later put, the Soviet leader got “exactly what he wanted” (qtd, in Conquest, 1991, 263).

At Yalta, the largest debates involved the installation of a new Polish government, the occupation of Germany and the formation of the United Nations. Yet, in early 1944, “the war had progressed to such a point that political decisions could do little more than ratify military reality” (Smith, 2007, 631). While agreement was forthcoming about the UN and the zones of occupation, Poland would be a harbinger of the Cold War. Stalin promised free and open elections, but those never came as Poland was transformed into a satellite state of the USSR. Roosevelt would later say in his final days, Stalin “has broken every one of the promises he made at Yalta” (qtd. in Conquest, 1991, 265).

Stalin’s actions in relation to Churchill and Roosevelt fall perfectly in place with *The Prince*. A Machiavellian leader needs to be both a metaphorical lion and a metaphorical fox, using brains and brawn (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). In negotiations, Stalin held firm and strong on his positions, while also engaging in ruthless and sly behavior like eavesdropping, exemplifying the duality of the lion and the fox. Throughout his relationship with Churchill and Roosevelt, too,
Stalin would put on air of friendliness and openness. Particularly with Roosevelt, Stalin appeared warm and often cordial, allowing the President to greatly misjudge his character. Machiavelli wanted his leaders “to appear to have [virtues],” and these apparent traits masked many of the inherent vices Stalin was set on undertaking (1988, 70). He simply took advantage of the good faith placed in him by Roosevelt, and to a lesser extent, Churchill, and expanded his power throughout Eastern Europe as a result. He refused to “observe faith,” as Machiavelli advised, when upholding pacts no longer favored him, instead breaking the agreements at Yalta and Tehran in order to expand his influence (Machiavelli, 1988, 69). Stalin effectively took advantage of the US and the UK diplomatically, while also taking military aid in return. Roosevelt had given away tools of war and expansion without creating any regional zones of influence in or around the Soviet Union. Where Roosevelt faltered, Stalin took advantage.

The one incredibly important tool that Churchill and Roosevelt kept from Stalin during the war was the nuclear bomb. Both Roosevelt and Churchill independently had scientific teams researching the possibility of nuclear fission to be used as a weapon, and the two leaders ultimately agreed to work jointly and share information in order to expedite the process, looking to create an atomic bomb before the Germans (Smith, 2007, 579-81). Successful tests of the operational nuclear bomb were not completed until after Roosevelt’s death and Churchill’s election loss, but the two executives spearheaded a remarkably Machiavellian project and weapon.

A nuclear warhead fit neatly into the framework of The Prince. Probably no other weapon was more capable of fulfilling the more distasteful Machiavellian tenets like: enemies “should be caressed or eliminated;” leaders “should not care about the infamy of cruelty;” and most of all a leader should “make himself feared,” a “lion to frighten wolves” (Machiavelli,
1988, 10; 65; 67-9). No weapon at the time was as capable of invoking elimination, cruelty and fear with same intensity as an atomic bomb. In agreeing to research weaponized nuclear fission, the Prime Minister and the President embodied the Machiavellian traits attributed to the bomb. Churchill and Roosevelt did not order the use of the nuclear bombs on Japan, but they enabled the later mass destruction for the sake of victory and the security of their states. Their choice was ruthless, with victory at any cost. Their bomb would ultimately bring the war to a close in August 1945.

In all, Allied relations during the war circulated around diplomacy. All three leaders can lay partial claim to winning the war thanks to their individual and collective efforts, and state survival and supremacy is certainly something admired in *The Prince*. However, Machiavellian foreign relations largely hinge on the balance of power between states, and Stalin likely was most adept at improving his international standing. Churchill ceded much of Britain’s dominance for survival, and the US grew to be the dominant force in the West as a result of the war and Roosevelt’s actions. However, Stalin’s maneuvering in relation to the rest of the Allies allowed him to gain more power than perhaps expected, reflecting a ruthless Machiavellian technique. The balance of power shaped by World War II would cast shadows that would ultimately define the Cold War.

**Conclusion**

Given their individual and collective actions during the war, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt undoubtedly acted in a Machiavellian fashion on many occasions. However, each leader had varying adherence to the framework set out in *The Prince*, and no leader followed all elements of the Florentine’s advice in their war-time decision-making. This thesis, though,
demonstrated three key findings. First, the research helped isolate a normative Machiavellian leader from a descriptive Machiavellian image of the political world. Next, this work applied Machiavelli’s framework to the WWII careers of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, recognizing their adherence to and aberrations from its principles. Finally, this thesis offered a new methodology for leadership analysis, taking a classic text and applying it to semi-modern examples.

This analysis of *The Prince* focused on normative statements depicting how Machiavelli wanted a prince to lead. The text also includes descriptive statements on Machiavelli’s realist and somewhat cynical understanding of politics and human nature, but those were not taken into account for creating a leadership framework. It would have been almost impossible to ascertain if any of the Big Three firmly believed Machiavelli’s descriptions of the way the political world operates. However, the text could be analyzed based on what leaders should do according to the Florentine. By looking at normative statements, like “the prince must” or “a prince should,” this thesis selected key actions a Machiavellian leader should take (Machiavelli, 1988, 42, 58). These actions, and Machiavelli’s name, often conjure connotations of amoral and ruthless leadership. Certainly, his guidance on leaders’ personal conduct reflected an aberration from traditional morals, where *The Prince* encouraged the appearance of virtue, while in reality allowing for whatever was necessary to maintain loyalty, control and ultimately power, even through the use of fear and force. Especially domestically, control and loyalty were important in placating the public and maintaining a grip on rule. Foreign and military affairs reflected this maintenance of control, with foreign and military actions often encouraging and consolidating domestic support of a prince. The other element of foreign and military affairs worked to secure a state against competing states that could usurp the prince’s position. As with domestic affairs, the means
allowed to maintain power internationally were broad in scope and loose in restrictions. However, amoral may be the wrong descriptor for these Machiavellian traits. In truth, he was a Renaissance realist, who viewed state leadership as putting order into chaos, both in a foreign and domestic sense. Machiavelli’s distinction was the lengths at which he was willing to go to maintain that order and control. The Big Three followed the Florentine’s framework to varying degrees.

Joseph Stalin certainly had no qualms with doing what he viewed as necessary to maintain power and control. Stalin often used his military and police forces with little remorse as to the consequences he was inflicting upon his soldiers, people and others. His sheer determination to win the war was somewhat Machiavellian, but his conduct leading up to the war and during the conflict lacked the cunning the Florentine would want out of a fox-like prince. While he did buy time to prepare for conflict with Germany through an initial non-aggression pact, he did not use that time prepare wisely and arrogantly hindered the Soviet Union’s military preparedness through overruling, expulsion and execution of Soviet officers before and during the war. Stalin did maintain power, though, and increased the USSR’s international standing through deception, force and will, especially when relating to Churchill and Roosevelt. Overall, then, Stalin’s performance as a Machiavellian leader during the war was mixed. He was ruthless and steadfast, but often his decisions were imprecise and tinged by paranoia and ignorance. Stalin kept and expanded his power, but a true Machiavellian could have done so at less cost.

Churchill was significantly more Machiavellian in foreign and military affairs than Stalin, reflecting an understanding that the Soviet leader lacked. His actions following the fall of France, in recruiting support from the United States, in withstanding German siege and in advocating for certain military campaigns, reflected an expertise and cunning that Machiavelli demanded.
However, Churchill had to navigate an existential threat to British global power. In enlisting the Allies help, he saved his state, but helped speed the decline and prominence of the Empire. Churchill’s actions helped embolden and empower the US and the USSR to rise to dominance on the world stage. Most importantly, Churchill’s actions cost him his own personal power, losing re-election just as the war was ending. Throughout the conduct of the war, Churchill adeptly handled British affairs, but he deviated from Machiavellian tenets domestically and lost his rule as a result. Churchill rose to the occasion that chance provided him and saved Britain but fell short of *The Prince* when he failed to save himself.

Of the three Allied leaders, Franklin D. Roosevelt may have been the most Machiavellian. Masterful in balancing foreign, military and domestic pressures, FDR used cunning to build powerful and winning coalitions on the home-front and abroad. Particularly in his handling of a recalcitrant public and Congress, Roosevelt managed to massively aid Britain and the Soviets in the war effort, all while maintaining his own domestic bedrock. Further, his decisions once the US entered the war reflected a wise military and political mind and a knack for selecting strong advisors. The decision to vigorously pursue the atomic bomb exemplified a Machiavellian ruthlessness. Only in his racist underestimation of Japan and his misplaced trust in Stalin did FDR violate Machiavellian principles. On the whole, though, the President kept power domestically and won the war abroad, using many techniques outlined in *The Prince* along the way.

Taken together, all of this research demonstrates that Machiavelli still has relevance in a modern political context. Leadership analysis can provide insight to both classic works and modern history, in this case Machiavelli to the Second World War. Through research and application, the full meaning of *The Prince* became clearer while casting the tenures of the Big
Three in a new political lens, offering new perspectives on their legacies. Interestingly, presidents, premiers and prime ministers do indeed follow frameworks outlined in *The Prince*, and Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill each represented different aspects of Machiavelli’s ideal leader to varying extents. These towering figures of the 20th century may not have recognized the comparisons in their actions with those in *The Prince*, but nonetheless they often mirrored the controversial Florentine’s example.

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