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Searle, DA

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J.F.C. Fuller's Assessment of Winston Churchill as Grand Strategist, 1939-45

ALARIC SEARLE

ABSTRACT

It is well known that Major General J.F.C. Fuller was a strong critic of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's grand strategy and strategic decision-making during the Second World War. Historians of Fuller's life, military theories, and historical writing have offered, however, few explanations as to the nature of this critique, when it first emerged, and what the motivations were which underpinned it. There has been little attempt to investigate just how well Fuller knew Churchill, either, or the extent to which this knowledge informed his historical writing. This article seeks to correct one or two of the general explanations which have been given, arguing that Fuller's questioning of Churchill's wartime leadership was based on a number of interlocking points of criticism, his personal knowledge of the Prime Minister, and that it represented the first sustained literary attack on his performance as a strategist during six years of total war.

KEYWORDS

Churchill, Winston; Fuller, J.F.C.; grand strategy; historiography; Second World War; strategic bombing; total war; unconditional surrender

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Introduction

Writing to his American publisher in February 1961, Major General J.F.C. Fuller remarked that while he had not seen Winston Churchill for many years, he had seen a great deal of him during his time at the War Office from 1918-22, and had "met him frequently" throughout the rest of the interwar period. He continued: "[t]he first occasion I saw him will amuse you; it was away back in the late '90s; he was creating a pandemonium in a famous London music hall, the Leicester Square 'Empire'." Fuller recounted how Churchill, together with some other young men, "was dodging about in the foyer," slapping women on their behinds, with a bouncer in hot pursuit. Reflecting on this incident, he added: "His life has been one series of larks, which unfortunately at times he mistakes for expressions of outstanding

genius. Frequently they are superficially brilliant and normally profoundly disastrous."¹

This critique was, in amusing shorthand, very much the line which Fuller followed in his major post-1945 publications, most notably his book, *The Second World War, 1939-1945* (1948). Here he was highly critical of many aspects of Churchill's wartime leadership but, in particular, strategic bombing. He wrote that "it was Mr. Churchill who lit the fuse which detonated a war of devastation and terrorization unrivalled since the invasion of the Seljuks." In the conclusion, he added that the real task of a Prime Minister in wartime was "to subordinate fighting power to a sane political end," something which "Mr. Churchill utterly failed to do."² This critique of Britain's wartime leader, and his alleged desire for destruction in place of policy, was repeated in several other publications.³ What makes it remarkable is that it occurred at a time when a large cross-section of Britain's elites were engaged in eulogizing Churchill's performance as Prime Minister, characterized by a volume published in 1953, entitled *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*. While this book did offer one or two discordant voices, these were confined to those on the political left, with criticism restricted to prewar domestic politics.⁴

In fact, no historian to date has made a detailed attempt to consider Fuller's critique of Winston Churchill as a grand strategist. While they have noted the way in which Fuller was a supporter of Churchill before 1939, Brian Holden Reid and A.J. Trythall have not systematically assessed the attacks on Churchill's conduct of the war in Fuller's wartime articles and postwar books.⁵ Holden Reid has written that it is difficult to explain the ferocity of Fuller's later comments on Churchill, but suggests that the former "had a temperamental aversion to siding with the popular view of any subject."⁶ Fuller's biographer offers a slightly different interpretation when

1. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University (hereinafter SCUA Rutgers), Major General J.F.C. Fuller Papers, box 3, file 34, Fuller to William Sloane, 3 February 1961. The incident Fuller was most likely referring to was a protest against the threatened closure of the theater in late 1894 at which Churchill was the ring-leader. However, the protest was really about public morals due to the presence of ladies of ill-repute who hung around in the foyer, attracting not only clients but also guardians of decency. For further details, see Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1991), pp. 46-47.

2. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Second World War, 1939-1945: A Strategical and Tactical History* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1948), pp. 222, 402.

3. For instance, J.F.C. Fuller, "Unstrategic Bombing and World Ruin," *Ordnance* 34 (September/October 1949), pp. 93-96.

4. Emanuel Shinwell, "Churchill as a Political Opponent," and George Issacs, "Churchill and the Trade Unions," in Charles Eade, ed., *Churchill – By His Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp. 75-83, 249-75.

5. Anthony John Trythall, *'Boney' Fuller: The Intellectual General, 1878-1966* (London: Cassell, 1977), pp. 214, 223, 236-37, 240, 249, 252, 258; Brian Holden Reid, *J.F.C. Fuller: Military Thinker* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 199-200.

6. Holden Reid, *J.F.C. Fuller*, p. 200.

he writes, "Churchill... came to symbolize for Fuller all the mistakes which Britain was making by his insistence on policies of unconditional surrender and area bombing."⁷ A closer study of the available material does suggest that Fuller knew Churchill fairly well, so this raises the question of how and why his initially very positive view of Churchill underwent such a dramatic transformation.

The intensity of Fuller's criticism of Winston Churchill's prosecution of the Second World War, and at a time when the issue of strategic bombing was studiously avoided in the first retrospective considerations of the Prime Minister's performance as war leader,⁸ raises a number of other interesting questions. Since Fuller was a contemporary of Churchill (he was only four years younger than him), was his criticism of his approach to total war partly informed by his close knowledge of the Prime Minister's personality? Where and when did he articulate his views? Most importantly, what was the nature of Fuller's criticism of Churchill's strategy and which areas did it encompass? Finally, to what extent was Fuller's critique of Churchill's wartime leadership out of step with the views prevalent at the time?

Given that few figures in modern British political history have attracted such uncritical praise as Winston Churchill,⁹ but also considering the extremely positive assessments of him as a wartime strategist and military leader,¹⁰ an examination of the opinions of one of his earliest and most intelligent critics suggests itself as an interesting and profitable line of enquiry. One reason is that Fuller's critique of Churchill's wartime strategy provided for many years one of the principal, authoritative alternatives to the sort of widespread, uncritical adulation symbolized by books such as *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*, a work which, itself, provides evidence of the interweaving of Churchill's reputation with the official celebrations of Britain's Pyrrhic victory in the Second World War. Moreover, as David Reynolds has argued, Churchill's own history of the war was considered almost as a substitute official history in Whitehall.¹¹ This can only heighten

7. Trythall, *'Boney' Fuller*, p. 214.

8. Symbolic of the avoidance of the issue in the immediate postwar period is the concluding chapter, A.L. Rowse, "The Summing-Up – Churchill's Place in History," in Eade, ed., *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*, pp. 336-49.

9. Among the more uncritical works, the standard biography is Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*. There have, of course, been revisionist interpretations, notably: John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory. A Political Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990); and, Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).

10. For instance: David Jablonsky, *Churchill, The Great Game and Total War* (London: Frank Cass, 1991); Tuvia Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992); Ronald Lewin, *Churchill as Warlord* (London: Batsford, 1973); and, John Keegan, "Churchill's Strategy," in Robert Blake and William Roger Louis, eds., *Churchill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 327-52.

11. David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. xxv-xxvi, 226-27, 339-40, 499-502, 510-14.

historical interest in any challenge to a view of the Prime Minister's performance as a wartime strategist, which had been partly manufactured by Churchill himself in the early aftermath of the conflict.

In order to pursue this subject in more detail, this article will address the following areas: first, the documented cases of contact between the two men during the Great War and then between the wars; second, Fuller's attitude towards Churchill during the Second World War while he was writing primarily as a journalist; third, Fuller's post-1945 view of Churchill, writing this time as an historian; and, finally, the general context in which Fuller's views were expressed. A detailed examination of J.F.C. Fuller's assessment of Churchill as a grand strategist is worthwhile because it promises to provide new insights into highly critical views which were presented at a time when very few – apart from those with direct experience of Allied and British decision-making¹² – dared to utter negative comments about the track record in strategic decision-making of Britain's Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. As we shall see, it was the intimate knowledge of Churchill's personality, based on personal observation, which lends Fuller's assessment an incisiveness equalled by only a very few of Churchill's contemporaries.

Encounters with Churchill, 1917-38

The first reference to Winston Churchill in Fuller's correspondence from the Great War is to be found in a letter to his mother of 18 July 1917: "I hear that Winston Churchill has been made Minister of Munitions. I think this will be a good thing as he is interested in us so I understand. Besides he has brains if no principles & many in the Government have neither."¹³ This comment reflected Fuller's deep-seated prejudice towards politicians, but indicates a clear if naive admiration of Churchill. Setting aside Fuller's experience of young Churchill creating havoc in the foyer of the Empire music hall in Leicester Square, the first occasion on which the two men seem to have met was later the same year at Tank Corps Headquarters at Bermicourt in northern France from 18-20 September.¹⁴ Writing to his mother shortly afterwards, he recounted:

A few days ago we had Winston Churchill out here[;] he stayed a

12. Some of the earliest criticisms were voiced, first by an aide of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Harry Butcher, then by Alan Brooke, via the device of edited versions of his diaries: Harry Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946); Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943* (London: Reprint Society, 1957), esp. "The Prelude," pp. 11-38, which attempts to prepare the reader for the shock of reading Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke's candid views of Churchill, which created a sensation when the book first appeared. See also the comments in Reynolds, *In Command of History*, pp. 39-40, 405-06, 514-20.

13. Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London (hereinafter LHCMA), Major-General J.F.C. Fuller Papers, IV/3/215, Fuller to his mother, 18 July 1917.

14. J.F.C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1936), p. 162.

couple of nights & I found him quite pleasant & very easy to talk to. He was quick & knew all about T's but was not the least affected. He gave me the impression that as far as he was concerned, he considered the war would go on for some time yet.¹⁵

A further encounter took place on 4 December 1917 at British Army General Headquarters (GHQ) at a conference on the 1917 tank program, over which Churchill presided. Fuller attended, together with other Tank Corps officers and their commander Hugh Elles; Fuller noted that Churchill appeared disappointed with the attitude of GHQ. Fuller then visited him at the Ministry of Munitions on 10 December; he requested that Fuller provide some notes on tanks, which were delivered two days later. This resulted in a further meeting between Elles, Fuller, and Churchill on 20 December, at which, according to Fuller's notes, Churchill "expressed his disgust at the little enthusiasm shown by GHQ for Tanks." On 12 February 1918, Fuller traveled to London to attend the Allied Tank Committee. The following day he met Churchill for lunch, where he complained to him about GHQ's behavior over tanks; there was another lunch appointment with him on 16 February before Fuller returned to France.¹⁶

A more personal meeting occurred on the same day, 16 February 1918, after Fuller had returned to his headquarters. While driving along a main road not far from Tank Corps HQ, the vehicle in which Fuller was traveling lost a wheel. It proved impossible to refit it and, after waiting twenty minutes, he hailed the next motor car which appeared. To his surprise, it contained Winston Churchill and the Duke of Westminster, and they invited Fuller to dinner at a château around five miles from his headquarters. The following day, Churchill took the trouble to travel to Tank Corps HQ where he had tea with Elles.¹⁷ On 25 February 1918, Churchill visited Tank Corps HQ once more for lunch, together with the Duke of Westminster, and Fuller was able to have a talk with him.¹⁸ These early contacts impressed Fuller because he became convinced that Churchill was a supporter of the Tank Corps.

Once Fuller was transferred to the War Office in London in August 1918, he is likely to have seen more of Churchill. Moreover, considering Churchill's position, first in Lloyd George's wartime government, then as Secretary of State for War and Air in the Coalition Government formed in January 1919, there can be little doubt that he was well aware of the

15. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/3/219, Fuller to his mother, 26 September 1917.

16. Tank Museum Archive and Reference Library, Bovington, Dorset (hereinafter, TMARL), Major-General J.F.C. Fuller Papers, Private Journal of Lt. Colonel J.F.C. Fuller, December 1917 to July 26, 1918, entries for 4, 10, 12 and 20 December 1917, 13 and 16 February 1918.

17. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/3/226, Fuller to his mother, 18 February 1918; Fuller, *Memoirs*, pp. 239-40; TMARL, Fuller Papers, Private Journal, entries for 16 and 17 February 1918.

18. TMARL, Fuller Papers, Private Journal, entry for 25 February 1918.

arguments for the tank being propounded by Fuller. Many of Fuller's most important arguments for the "mechanicalisation" of the army could be found in *Weekly Tank Notes*, the internal government journal produced by himself and another staff officer, which was likely to have been read by Churchill since he had recommended in early 1919 to the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff that some of Fuller's papers be published in a volume for confidential use.¹⁹

Evidence of the influence of Fuller's thinking on mechanization on Churchill, in particular the economies which could be made, is circumstantial. Nonetheless, Churchill was not someone to attribute ideas to others. And, when one looks at speeches and writings by him from the early 1920s, it seems likely that some of his statements on mechanization owed at least something to Fuller. If we look, for example, at a speech in the House of Commons from 23 February 1920, speaking as Secretary of State for the Army and Air Force, he talked of the need for a mechanical army, the future possibilities of the tank, and the "substantial saving in cost" which mechanical warfare could bring. He called for the Air Force to make better use of air power as a means of reducing the garrison in Mesopotamia, and argued for a gradual employment of schemes for introducing economies.²⁰ In fact, the Tank Corps publicly acknowledged Churchill as a supporter, making him the main guest of honor at the second Tank Corps Cambrai dinner at the Hyde Park Hotel in London on 20 November 1921, a dinner attended by leading figures of the Corps, including Fuller.²¹

When one takes Churchill's penchant for military talent-spotting, particularly with a view to developing his own sources of military intelligence, these early contacts seem to be more than of just a minor nature.²² As the Chief Staff Officer of the Tank Corps, Fuller was an extremely interesting personality from Churchill's point of view. In many ways, they had much in common. In terms of their military careers, both had attended the Royal Military College Sandhurst, Churchill four years before Fuller. They had both experienced the Boer War. Fuller's unconventional approach to military affairs must have appeared intriguing to Churchill's restless and impatient mind. Politically speaking, in 1919 they were both ferociously anti-Bolshevik. Considering Churchill's desire to intervene in the Russian Civil War, it is possible he was aware of Fuller's suggestions made to the War Office that a tank force should be employed against Bolshevik units.²³

19. Fuller, *Memoirs*, pp. 344-45; Trythall, '*Boney' Fuller*', pp. 75-96.

20. Hansard, HC Debates, 23 February 1920, vol. 125, cc1339-1455; 'By a Student of Politics,' "Army Policy: 'Normal' Cost below Pre-War. Battle Mechanics. The New Tanks," *The Times*, 24 February 1920, p. 17.

21. "Tank Corps Dinner," *Daily Telegraph*, 21 November 1921; Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Sir Eustace Tennyson D'Eyncourt Papers, DEY/60, Tank Corps Dinner, pamphlet, 1 September 1920.

22. David Stafford, *Churchill and Secret Service* (New York: Overlook, 1998), esp. pp. 3, 5-6, 145-57.

23. The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereinafter TNA), WO

Indeed, as Paul Addison has noted, anti-Bolshevism was the defining feature of the second political life which marked the "three lives" of his career in politics.²⁴ So, in the immediate postwar period, from 1918-22, there was a great deal of common ground which he will have found between himself and Fuller. It is likely, too, that Fuller will have seen Churchill as a fellow anti-Bolshevik.

That Fuller believed Churchill was a supporter of some of his theories of mechanization can be seen in an approach he made to him to request that he provide a foreword to his 1928 book, *On Future Warfare*. Writing to Churchill in March 1928, Fuller asked whether he would be so kind as to write a "brief foreword to a book I am bringing out." Enclosing the preface and contents pages of the galleys, he explained that "[i]t contains the bulk of the military gospel I have been preaching since the war." Although he noted that he knew how busy Churchill was, he thought that "a few words from you who had so much to do with the initiation of tank warfare will help things on."²⁵ As his initial note to his secretary began with the comment, "I presume this is Napoleon Fuller of the Tank Corps?"²⁶ a reference to Fuller's nickname of "Boney," it is clear Churchill was aware who the correspondent was. But although he decided that the four hundred words Fuller had requested would be too much given his workload, this was not a straight rebuff.²⁷

A few months later, in June 1928, Fuller received a letter from Churchill's secretary, writing from the "Treasury Chambers," which read: "Now that the Chancellor is back in London, he hopes to be able to arrange for the Luncheon which was frustrated by his illness. Could you come to him at 11 Downing Street on Thursday, the 21st, at 1.30?"²⁸ This invitation shows that, even though he was certainly not an intimate, Fuller was not a mere passing acquaintance of Churchill's. It can be ascertained from the latter's correspondence that around the same time he was invited by Churchill to "a men's luncheon party."²⁹ One of the results of these lunches may have been a request the following month that Fuller supply Lord Birkenhead, one of Churchill's cronies, with "some authoritative information or opinion on the

32/5685, Col J.F.C. Fuller, Proposal towards the formation of a Tank Expeditionary Force, S.D.7, 14 April 1919.

24. Paul Addison, "The Three Careers of Winston Churchill," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series XI (2001), pp. 183-99.

25. Churchill College Archives, Cambridge (hereinafter CCA), Churchill/Chartwell Papers, CHAR 2/157/86, Fuller to Churchill, 18 March 1928, and CHAR 2/157/87, seven galley proof pages of *On Future Warfare*.

26. CCA, Churchill/Chartwell Papers, CHAR 2/157/85, note to Marsh, 21 March 1928.

27. CCA, Churchill/Chartwell Papers, CHAR 2/157/82-83, Fuller to Marsh, 22 March 1928; SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 2, file 12, Churchill to Fuller, 27 March 1928.

28. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 2, file 12, Marsh to Fuller, 11 June 1928.

29. Churchill to Sir Roger Keyes, 19 June 1928, reproduced in Martin Gilbert, ed., *Winston S. Churchill*, Vol. V, Companion Part I, Documents, *The Exchequer Years, 1922-1929* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 1303.

question of warfare in the future." Although the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had passed on his name, the request to call on Lord Birkenhead at the India Office seven days later suggests that the request may have been the result of discussions at the lunch.³⁰

There is little doubt that Fuller's view of Churchill was, by the beginning of the 1930s, colored by the latter's strong support for tanks in the Great War.³¹ This can be seen quite clearly in his *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, published in 1936. But is there anything more to be taken from the pages of Fuller's memoirs, given its flattering portrayal of Churchill? The positive view presented in this work certainly went down well with Churchill himself. On receiving a copy of the book, he wrote to thank its author, remarking:

I am very grateful to you for sending me a copy of your book. I have not had time yet to read it as I look forward to doing, but I notice you have said one or two unduly complimentary things about me and my work in helping with the tanks. I hope to read the book thoroughly in the near future.³²

But was this simply a question of an acknowledgement of Churchill's role in the development of the tank during the Great War, or was there any political approval of Churchill at this time on Fuller's part? At any rate, the references to Churchill by Fuller in his memoirs show that in 1936 he still admired him, not simply for the support he had offered the cause of the Tank Corps as Minister of Munitions, but also as a man who had cut through the red tape of the War Office while he was serving as Secretary of State for War.³³

Despite Fuller's decision to join the British Union of Fascists in 1934,³⁴ Churchill had no qualms about meeting him at Buck's Club in London at a dinner held by the Secretary of State for War, Alfred Duff Cooper, in February 1936, which was also attended by Basil Liddell Hart and Lord Trenchar. Liddell Hart's meticulous notes on the conversation show the range of topics which the guests discussed: the coordination of defense, the danger from Germany, the value of the French Army for European security, mechanization, the Cardwell system, airpower, the High Command, army organization, and the Abyssinian War. In their discussion of the system for

30. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 2, file 12, civil servant [name illegible] (India Office) to Fuller, 11 July 1928.

31. Churchill's interpretation of the significance of the Battle of Cambrai was in line with Fuller's works, going perhaps even further. In his criticism of the offensives of 1917, he answered his own rhetorical question of what else could have been done by pointing to Cambrai, and exclaiming, "This could have been done." See Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, abgd. and rev. ed. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931), pp. 718-21.

32. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 2, file 16, Churchill to Fuller, 7 April 1936.

33. Fuller, *Memoirs*, pp. 364, 367, 373.

34. Trythall, 'Boney' Fuller, pp. 180-84.

the coordination of defense, Liddell Hart noted that Churchill had started to hog the conversation: "Twice when Fuller tried to get an innings, Winston shut him up quite snappily – 'Do let me finish what I'm saying.' Then when Fuller got a turn Winston's come-back showed that he had missed the point – as Duff Cooper pointed out."³⁵ On the question of the Cardwell system,³⁶ Fuller argued that it needed to be abandoned, whereas Churchill wanted to keep it, although Liddell Hart observed: "Winston... did not realise how few British troops there were on the North-West Frontier." Fuller was quizzed by Churchill on the war in Abyssinia, from which he had just returned. While Trenchard left at 11.00, the rest of the party carried on talking until 12.30.³⁷

By the mid-1930s, though, Fuller's view of Churchill had started to contain hints of ambivalence. On the one hand, his main enemy was what he described as "Baldwinism." For him, Stanley Baldwin was responsible for the disintegration of the Empire and the illusion of collective security.³⁸ In May 1936, Fuller attacked Baldwin for what he saw as his incompetence in defense matters, writing:

when Mr. Baldwin is faced with a great military problem, such as the co-ordination of our fighting forces, instead of asking Mr. Churchill or somebody who knows something about it to take charge, he spends several weeks looking around for a man who has less brains than himself.

The individual who Fuller had in mind here was Sir Thomas Inskip, who had taken over as the Minister for the Coordination of Defence, although he also expressed a negative view of the understanding of military affairs on the part of Alfred Duff Cooper, the Secretary of State for War.³⁹ Yet, the criticism of Baldwin, Inskip, and Duff Cooper should not be taken as an immediate

35. LHCMA, Sir Basil Liddell Hart Papers, LH 11/1936/40, Notes on discussion at Duff Cooper's Dinner – Buck's Club, 14 February 1936.

36. Among many innovations, such as the introduction of the new branches of Military Education and Military Intelligence, probably the key principle of the Cardwell reforms was the "localization" of regular regiments (i.e. the establishment of a home base to which they would return from active service) and their fusion with the auxiliary forces. Interwar critics of the Cardwell System argued that it was incompatible with the mechanization of the army. For a contemporary defense of Cardwell's reforms, see Lieutenant General Sir E.A. Altham, "The Cardwell System," *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 73 (1928), pp. 108-14.

37. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 11/1936/40, Notes on discussion at Duff Cooper's Dinner, 14 February 1936. Fuller's questioning of the viability of the Cardwell System clearly made an impression on Churchill, for he wrote to Liddell Hart asking for further information. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/171/22, Churchill to Liddell Hart, 16 February 1936, and LH 1/171/23, Liddell Hart to Churchill, 20 February 1936.

38. Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, "On What Should Our Foreign Policy be Based?" *Action*, 29 January 1938, p. 7.

39. Anon. [J.F.C. Fuller], "Lessons from Ethiopia: Collective Insanity," *Action*, 7 May 1936, p. 9. On Thomas Inskip, see Sean Greenwood, "'Caligula's Horse' Revisited: Sir Thomas Inskip as Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, 1936-1939," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 17 (March 1994), pp. 17-38.

endorsement of Churchill as the perfect candidate for Minister for the Coordination of Defence.

In an article on rearmament in August 1936, Fuller returned to his criticism of Inskip's policies, arguing that more money needed to be spent on aircraft rather than battleships and infantry. In order to cover up "this futility" there was "a constant chatter of war."⁴⁰ It was then that his first criticism of Churchill appeared, even if the article was published anonymously:

On the one hand, Mr. Churchill thunders against Germany, as eighteen years ago he was thundering against the U.S.S.R. As he then missed his chance of leading an army to Moscow, to-day he has joined Lord Davies' "New Commonwealth," no doubt in order to lead one to Berlin. He startles us by proclaiming that Germany is spending 800,000,000 a year on armaments and is getting something for them. But instead, should we not be startled by the contemplation that, since 1919, we have spent several thousands of millions on our Fighting Forces, which to-day are so deficient that we have got Thomas Inskip.⁴¹

While this statement was not a direct attack on Churchill's abilities in defense matters, Fuller does raise here – apparently for the first time – the issue of his judgement and his desire for publicity. And, in a report prepared for British intelligence after one of Fuller's three visits to Nationalist Spain during the Civil War, he singled out Churchill for criticism again, referring to him as "the supreme intervener in the civil war in Russia during 1919-1921"; this was followed with an indication of his disapproval of Churchill's alleged new-found belief in the need to prevent a triumph of either side in Spain.⁴²

In short, during the 1930s Fuller made only a few negative remarks about Churchill; and, even these appeared in articles which were published anonymously. After the outbreak of war, there was however a final twist in the relationship between the two men, one which needs to be borne in mind when considering Fuller's subsequent critique of Churchill as Britain's "supreme commander" during the Second World War.

The Second World War, 1939-45: A Journalist's Critique

The relationship between Fuller and Churchill took a new turn once the Second World War had begun. As a leading member of the British Union of Fascists, Fuller was one of the few prominent members of Mosley's party not

40. 'By Our Military Correspondent' [J.F.C. Fuller], "Our Rearmament Racket: Preparing for the Last War Instead of the Next," *Action*, 13 August 1936, p. 9.

41. *Ibid.*

42. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 6, J.F.C. Fuller, *The Spanish Civil War: Behind Franco's Front*, typescript, n.d. [1937/38], p. 67. For Churchill's views on the Spanish Civil War, see, for example, "Spain's Road to Peace," (26 November 1937), reproduced in Winston S. Churchill, *Step By Step 1936-1939* (London: MacMillan, 1943), pp. 180-83.

to be interned in 1940. Was it, as has long been suspected, Churchill's protecting hand which prevented Fuller's internment?⁴³ A clear and unequivocal archive source which would clear up this question is unfortunately missing. But one intriguing angle is provided by a few documents which show that Fuller was proposed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Edmund Ironside, as his deputy, and the proposal was discussed at a Cabinet Meeting on Thursday, 19 October 1939. The minutes of the meeting suggest that some members of the Cabinet spoke in favor of Fuller, but that the Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, postponed a decision, thus successfully sinking the proposal.⁴⁴ Had Churchill spoken up for Fuller? Yet, more importantly, did Fuller later blame Churchill for not allowing him to return to military service?

With the last chance of a return to military duty gone, for the duration of the war Fuller was largely left to his own devices. His main area of activity was in journalism; and it was in this realm that he became critical of Churchill, even if it took until 1942 for this work to gather any momentum. Much of his writing for newspapers, in particular the *Evening Standard*, was based on historical material, tailored to specific ideas which related to recent events in the war. Thus, one article of 20 November 1942, celebrating the British victory at the Battle of El Alamein, got round his lack of access to information, other than what he was able to read in the daily press, by using his knowledge of the Battle of Cambrai. He concluded: "Cambrai sowed the seeds of a tactical revolution. El Alamein gathered the harvest in."⁴⁵ There were many other articles, born out of wartime necessity, ingenious in themselves, but with no striking insights.⁴⁶ It was not until 1943 that Fuller's articles started to pack more journalistic punch.

In early 1943, Fuller quoted a statement by Churchill in the House of Commons from 11 November 1942 on the Battle of El Alamein, which had pointed to the need for infantry to clear a path through the enemy defenses for the tanks, which concluded with the comment: "This battle is, in fact, a very fine example of the military art as developed under modern conditions." Fuller added, with a hint of sarcasm: "With all deference to the Prime Minister's tactical opinions, I should have said 'antiquated conditions,' and for the simple reason that, between 1919 and 1942, the problem of neutralising the anti-tank mine was not considered."⁴⁷ This was not the opening of

43. Trythall, *'Boney' Fuller*, p. 217, giving Liddell Hart as the source for this point of speculation.

44. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 2, file 19, War Office Temporary Pass, 27 September 1939, and Fuller to Ironside, 16 October 1939; TNA, CAB 65/1/52, War Cabinet (52), Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, 19 October 1939, pp. 431-32.

45. J.F.C. Fuller, "Cambrai to El Alamein" (20 November 1942), in idem, *Watchwords* (London: Skeffington, 1944), pp. 15-17.

46. For instance, J.F.C. Fuller, "Wanted – A Super-General Staff," *Evening Standard*, 8 January 1942, and idem, "Send an Army to Russia," *Sunday Pictorial*, 15 March 1942.

47. J.F.C. Fuller, "Why Not Dig up the Mummies?" (31 March 1943), in idem,

an assault on Churchill, rather Fuller started to identify aspects of the conduct of the war with which he did not agree: the two central points which emerged in 1943 were the policy of unconditional surrender and the strategic bombing campaign.

In April 1943 he took a swipe at the policy of unconditional surrender in a piece criticizing what he saw as a lack of sophistication in British propaganda aimed at Germany. Singling out a statement by a government minister that all Nazi leaders and perpetrators of crimes would be tried and punished with the utmost severity, he remarked: "It is not the contents of such utterances that I question, instead it is the wisdom of broadcasting them to the enemy." And he added: "When are we going to be a little more scientific in our propaganda by keeping our Unconditional Surrenders well up our sleeves?" He argued that if the war aim of Britain was not the complete extermination of the enemy, then propaganda needed to be directed towards establishing a stable peace.⁴⁸ In mid-August he returned to the subject and launched another attack on the policy: "By rigidly fixing 'Unconditional Surrender' as the sole means of terminating hostilities," Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt had "committed the greatest act of unwisdom as yet recorded during the war."⁴⁹

While he would return again to the issue of unconditional surrender, it was to the strategic bombing campaign which the majority of his writing was devoted in 1943. In June he compared the bombing by the Royal Air Force of Italian cities – Naples, Turin, and Milan – to the destructive campaign of Attila the Hun in Italy in 452. If the comparison seemed inappropriate, he thought one could also be made with the Wars of Religion, 1562-1648. He did not apportion blame to any one country, but thought that "the crucial question is, not who first unleashed this hurricane of destruction, but that all nations were ready to unleash it." He considered that the violence could not be stopped, so the only thing to be done was to win the war as quickly as possible because the longer it lasted the greater would be the devastation.⁵⁰ In August, he pointed out that once Mussolini's regime had been removed the bombing of Italy had in fact intensified rather than been reduced.⁵¹

Nonetheless, behind the drive to destroy as much as possible he saw a specific military mentality which he had encountered during the First World War: generals obsessed by calculating ever greater numbers of shells because, for them, numbers of shells was the way to win wars. But, as had been the case in the First World War, uncontrolled destruction violated the

Watchwords, pp. 43-45.

48. J.F.C. Fuller, "Improperganda" (30 April 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 53-56.

49. J.F.C. Fuller, "A Straight Talk to the Politicians" (15 August 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 93-96.

50. J.F.C. Fuller, "Back to Attila" (11 June 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 69-71.

51. J.F.C. Fuller, "The Attack by Terror" (20 August 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 99-101.

important principle of economy of force.⁵² More importantly, Fuller began to raise the issue of what the destruction from the air would mean for the postwar world. While he still adhered to the assumption that what was happening was probably inevitable, he pleaded, "do let us understand what we are doing and observe its results." He warned that another year of bombing of this type and Germany would collapse, creating a complete industrial vacuum in central Europe. There would be no possibility of trade for years to come, with the effect that there would be "years of grinding taxation, of toil, of rationing, of low wages, of small profits – of general discontent."⁵³

In August 1943 his attacks on the strategic bombing campaign became stronger. In an article of 20 August 1943 entitled "The Attack by Terror," he quoted Churchill, who had stated in relation to the war in Italy, "We shall not stain our name by inhuman acts." But this had been followed six days later by a statement from the Under-Secretary for Air, Captain Harold Balfour, who had proclaimed: "We are going right on to the end with our bombing attacks, just as long as the peoples of Germany and Italy tolerate Nazism and Fascism." Fuller then made the moral case against strategic bombing, objecting – as a soldier – to his own life being insured "by the slaughter of women and children, whether they are Germans or Italians or of any other nation." While the criticism was still directed at Churchill's government at this stage, it could not have been more unmistakable: "Since the Irish massacrings of Cromwell – the moral and political effects of which are still with us – this policy of terror is something quite new in our history."⁵⁴ But the following month, he made a more direct attack on Churchill's conduct of the war.

In an article on the question of the opening of the second front, the invasion of northwest Europe in other words, Fuller argued that penetrating the Atlantic Wall would depend upon surprise and the use of airborne forces. The invasion was essentially an air problem because a landing would only be possible if air supremacy had first been established and the German defensive forces prevented from reinforcing the main defensive line. The reason why the attack had not taken place was that "we have put most of our eggs into the big bomber basket." He then noted that Mr. Churchill had talked of the policy of strategic bombing as "an experiment worth trying out." He concluded: "Seeing as he is no novice in things military, it is strange that it has not occurred to him that strategy is not an experimental science, and that it is strategy which should invariably set the tactical

52. J.F.C. Fuller, "Victory by Slide-Rule" (26 June 1943), and "Waste Not Want Not" (30 June 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 74-77, 77-79.

53. J.F.C. Fuller, "The Economic Consequences of the War" (1 July 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 80-82.

54. J.F.C. Fuller, "The Attack by Terror" (20 August 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 99-101.

pace."⁵⁵ In another article the following month on the Second Front, he made the point that it had first emerged for the Allies in August 1941, "not as a strategical conception but as a political slogan."⁵⁶

But the strongest criticism of Churchill's strategic conduct of the war occurred towards the end of the year. In a piece entitled "Policy and War," Fuller began with several quotations from Carl von Clausewitz's famous work, *On War*, in order to highlight the point that policy is the directing factor in war and that the subordination of political considerations to military ones would be contrary to common sense. He argued that policy during the present war had not been governed by self-interest, but rather "violence flogged into frenzy by hate." He then made a direct attack on Churchill:

Thus far, Mr. Churchill, the leader of our 1935 pacifists, has shown such an unqualified gusto for war that he would seem to have overlooked the fact that in war the constant aim of the head of a State is the establishment of a profitable peace. Should this be so, then he has subordinated the political point of view to the military, and, in consequence, if Clausewitz be right, has jettisoned common sense. "There is no sacrifice we will not make, no length in violence to which we will not go", though excellent militarily, what is its political end[?]

He concluded by observing that "those hard-headed Englishmen who built our Empire" would have been astonished at the abandonment of politics, since they recognized that "a military victory is not in itself equivalent to success in war."⁵⁷

A particularly interesting article appeared on 30 January 1944, interesting because in it Fuller leveled criticism at Churchill between the lines. Writing about the snail-like development of a battle-worthy British tank, Fuller recounted the very slow and imperfect evolution of British tanks since Dunkirk, pointing the finger at officialdom and the members of the Tank Board, who he thought "certainly had open minds, for all were unhampered by any knowledge of tank design whatsoever!" He noted that in June 1940 Mr. Churchill had ordered a new tank, the A22 or Churchill, which had made a brief appearance at El Alamein, armed with a two-pounder gun, and in Tunisia a few had appeared with a six-pounder gun. Fuller was describing what is now known as the "great tank scandal."⁵⁸ In describing a tale of official incompetence and muddle, he concluded: "For while no doubt the

55. J.F.C. Fuller, "Stalin's Second Front" (7 September 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 107-09.

56. J.F.C. Fuller, "Strategy of the Second Front," *Evening Standard*, 29 October 1943.

57. J.F.C. Fuller, "Policy and War," (7 December 1943), in idem, *Watchwords*, pp. 134-36. In articles in early 1944, he attacked the apparent descent of warfare into barbarity and complained that "individual liberty" had disappeared in Britain. J.F.C. Fuller, "Barbarity of War Without Rules," *Evening Standard*, 4 February 1944, and idem, "Danger in a New Socialism," *Evening Standard*, 18 February 1944.

58. For more details, see David Fletcher, *The Great Tank Scandal: British Armour in the Second World War*, Part 1 (London: HMSO, 1989).

Churchill tank in its present form has its uses and, indeed, many supporters, despite its lack of speed, the fact remains that after four years of war, Britain is still without a tank as good as the American Sherman." This comment does sound suspiciously like an attempt to use the "Churchill tank" to provide a form of covert criticism of "Churchill the war leader."⁵⁹

In an article in the *Leader* in April 1944, Fuller addressed the changes which had been brought about by the war, in particular what he regarded as a new form of wartime society, which he dubbed "the factory-barrack order." From the point of view of popular psychology in the new society made up of soldiers and factory workers, the war could be divided into two periods: "the Churchillian and the Stalinian." Fuller was outraged that since Stalingrad it was not permitted to utter any criticism of Russia in the press. In his characterization of the first phase of the war, there was a certain hint of sarcasm, when he wrote that "the people were united in an invincible solidarity under Mr. Churchill – their hero; 'sweat, blood and tears' was their slogan."⁶⁰ There was more sarcasm directed at the Prime Minister in August 1944 in an article on the financial dimensions to the war. Churchill was quoted at length, speaking shortly after the gold standard crashed in 1931, it being noted that Hitler had been thinking along "identical lines" at the time: "But Hitler was a dictator, therefore, unlike Mr. Churchill, it was necessary for him to search out new methods."⁶¹

At the end of 1944, he returned again to the question of unconditional surrender in an article in the *Sunday Pictorial*. Here he made the argument that, with the "slogan" of unconditional surrender, the Allies had bungled in the political sphere because any form of peace appeared to be worse for Germany than the war itself. He argued that the spreading of destruction by the soldiers had not been accompanied by political measures. In Italy in July-August 1943 the Allies should have welcomed the Italians' defection; the bomb plot in July 1944 could, likewise, have been better exploited politically. The breakthrough achieved by Patton was also, according to Fuller, not exploited because it was accompanied by Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks, and talk of international control of the Ruhr. He attacked Churchill for his statement in the House of Commons on 23 February 1944: "There will be, for instance, no question of the Atlantic Charter applying to Germany as a matter of right and barring territorial transference or adjustments in enemy countries." As well as convincing Germany not to surrender, this development had led to "a growing sense of doubt and uncertainty

59. Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, "Where Are Our Tanks? A Grave Exposure of Official Blunders," *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 January 1944, p. 4. Fuller had written articles on this subject earlier in the war, such as: "The Weapons of Victory," *Sunday Pictorial*, 19 July 1942; and, "These Weapons Will Decide," *Sunday Pictorial*, 6 September 1942.

60. J.F.C. Fuller, "Bricks and Blood" (*The Leader*, 8 April 1944), in idem, *Thunderbolts* (London: Skeffington, 1946), pp. 59-61.

61. J.F.C. Fuller, "The Babes in the Wood" (6 August 1944), in idem, *Thunderbolts*, pp. 97-99.

throughout the world as to what the Allied Powers were fighting for." He concluded by asking rhetorically whether the war would end in a reasonable peace or world revolution.⁶² The "dawn of liberation" had not in any way tempered Fuller's critique.

After the Battle, 1945-61: The Historian's Critique

By the close of the Second World War, the perceived errors in Churchill's approach to grand strategy were already becoming cemented in Fuller's historical view of the war. Writing shortly after the end of hostilities in *Armament and History*, a work first published the following year due to paper shortages, in discussing atomic energy he pointed to statesmen's lack of awareness of Clausewitz. Making another dig at Churchill, he wrote: "Had statesmen only consulted Clausewitz, they could not have fallen into what I will call the Churchillian error of mistaking military means for political ends."⁶³ It was this critique of Churchill, which had emerged during the war, which was gradually to become "formalized" in three major histories, most prominently in his 1948 book, *The Second World War, 1939-1945*.

In this work, Fuller begins with one or two barbs directed at Churchill and his personality specifically. From the Allied perspective, the surprise occupation of Norway on 9 April 1940 ought to have led to a rapid response. But, according to Fuller, "and in spite of the pugnacious Mr. Churchill being at the time First Lord of the Admiralty, except for laying mines in the Skagerrak nothing was done until the 15th to impede the invaders."⁶⁴ Fuller introduces at this point two key elements in his critique: the first is a reference to Churchill's instinctive pugnacity, which Fuller equates with lack of serious strategic thinking; the second is to question his much vaunted military abilities by highlighting the First Lord of the Admiralty's uncertainty as to how to carry his operation through to a successful conclusion.⁶⁵

Beyond personal flaws, it was in the section on the strategic bombing of Germany that Fuller turned his guns on Churchill as a strategist. At least between the lines, he voiced his disapproval of the fact that the British War Cabinet was the only link between the ministries of the army, navy, and air force, and that Churchill himself was that link because he was Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. This had enabled him, upon taking office as Prime Minister, to launch strategic bombing in full. Fuller continued that

62. J.F.C. Fuller, "The Foundations of Victory" (*Sunday Pictorial*, 31 December 1944), in idem, *Thunderbolts*, pp. 126-30.

63. J.F.C. Fuller, *Armament and History: A Study of the Influence of Armament on History from the Dawn of Classical Warfare to the Second World War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1946), p. 199.

64. Fuller, *Second World War*, pp. 60-61.

65. Churchill's bungling in the Norwegian Campaign was picked up much later by critical historians, among them: Basil Liddell Hart, "The Military Strategist," in A.J.P. Taylor, et al., *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 153-202, here 184-87; and, Ponting, *Churchill*, pp. 417-31.

the attacks of devastation were not strategically significant, adding sarcastically that "the entire strategic problem was misread by Mr. Churchill and his advisers – if he had any." He argued that, in 1940, Germany's main problem was to cross the English Channel. But Churchill had succeeded, through strategic bombing, in separating air power from sea and land power. He noted mischievously that Churchill should have realised that Britain's strategic problem was, initially, essentially naval, as his great ancestor the first Duke of Marlborough had done in his day. Ultimately, up to the spring of 1944, the strategic bombing of Germany was "an extravagant failure," which prolonged the war through its cost in raw materials and manpower.⁶⁶

In his narrative of the strategic development of the war, once again the policy of "unconditional surrender" came in for intense criticism. When the strategic initiative passed to the Allies in mid-1943, Fuller argued that the Western Allies had failed to exploit the situation. With Italy on the point of collapse, and German morale crumbling, this was the psychological point at which peace terms could have energized the German opposition whose revolt would have occurred a year earlier and been successful. But the Casablanca Conference of January 1943 had led to the declaration of unconditional surrender as a major war aim: "Henceforth these two words were to hang like a putrifying albatross around the necks of America and Britain." Fuller laid the blame at the door of President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill because they had not asked themselves the question: "What is the object of war?" For Fuller, the correct answer was, "to change the enemy's mind." The impact of this error, as he saw it, was that, by prolonging the war, Russia was to emerge as dominant in Europe by the end of the war, leading to "the replacement of Nazi tyranny by an even more barbaric despotism."⁶⁷

Fuller also implied that, in 1943, Churchill was determined to attack the "soft under-belly" of Europe, his Italian campaign, but as a means of vindicating his strategy in 1915. According to Fuller, "his prestige as a strategist, backed by his forceful personality, carried the day." Criticism was also leveled at the way in which the declared goals of the strategy – to regain command of the Mediterranean, draw German strength away from Russia, to tie down German forces which would otherwise have been transferred to France, to assist the resistance in Yugoslavia, and to secure the Foggia airfields in Italy – did not actually require the conquest of the whole of Italy. That this became the actual central aim of Allied strategy Fuller ascribed to "Mr. Churchill's persistence that the conquest of Italy should be vigorously

66. Fuller, *Second World War*, pp. 220-31. The reference to Marlborough was mischievous because Churchill had authored a four-volume biography of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, which was published as *Marlborough, His Life and Times* (London: George Harrap, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1938). The writing of this work has been considered as having acted as a form of preparation for Churchill in the problems of coalition warfare.

67. Fuller, *Second World War*, pp. 257-59.

prosecuted after Sicily had been occupied." His final verdict could not have been more damning, namely, that "the Allies hard won initiative was in part squandered on a campaign which for lack of strategic sense and tactical imagination is unique in military history."⁶⁸ To quote Fuller, with his striking turn of phrase, "Unconditional surrender transformed the 'soft under-belly' into a crocodile's back; prolonged the war; wrecked Italy; and wasted thousands of American and British lives."⁶⁹ The consequences of the Italian Campaign were clear to Fuller: by the end of 1943, there was a wholesale surrender by the Western Allies to Russian designs on Europe. "The Atlantic Charter was thrown overboard" and Stalin was in a position to direct his forthcoming offensives towards Eastern Europe and the Balkans. For Fuller, the ultimate humiliation was the presentation on 29 November 1943 at Tehran of a Crusader's sword to Stalin by Churchill, "to the strains of the *Internationale*."⁷⁰

There was more criticism at the grand strategic level which was reserved for Churchill and Roosevelt in relation to the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan. If the demands of unconditional surrender on the country had been abandoned, and the Emperor's position had been preserved, according to Fuller there might have been the opportunity to have avoided the detonation of the bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁷¹ In his concluding thoughts, Fuller laid further blame at Churchill's door, accusing him of being "ever consistent in his inconsistency." While the Prime Minister had "for years thundered against Stalinism," he opened the gates of Europe to an invasion by the Russians. His hatred of Hitlerism blinded him politically and strategically to the need for a balance of power in Europe, so that "he wrecked the foundations upon which the British Empire had been built." Due to Churchill's pursuit of "unlimited warfare to its ultimate end," by annihilating Germany he demolished the basis for Britain's traditional strategy and foreign policy. And, he had put Douhet's strategic bombing theory into practice "because it fitted his policy of annihilation."⁷²

Finally, Fuller sought to counter the objection that the war had been a life and death struggle and, therefore, that Churchill had been right to apply all means available to winning the war. He argued that the struggle was never one between life and death, as long as Britain retained command of the seas: in fact, after the Battle of Britain, the conflict settled into a stalemate. He thought that the excuses which were offered in 1940 and 1941 to justify a policy of annihilation were clearly redundant well before May 1943. He accused Churchill of having failed to recognize that "the Russian way of life was more antagonistic to the British than the German way of life." A "far-sighted statesman" would have done everything to prevent the obliteration of

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 260-61.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 390-97.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

Germany, but unfortunately "far-sightedness was not Mr. Churchill's outstanding quality." Fuller went even so far as to consider Churchill's motivation to be his own historical reputation as warlord and strategist. Churchill had failed in his grand strategy because he subordinated political ends to military means.⁷³

After the publication of his history of the Second World War,⁷⁴ Fuller displayed a remarkable bitterness towards Churchill which was also reflected in his private correspondence. In November 1948 he wrote to Liddell Hart that Churchill had been "quite the worst S. of S. [Secretary of State] for War we ever had." He argued that in 1920 Churchill had had "every opportunity to put the army on a reasonably modern footing." Yet this chance had been squandered "in his private war with Lenin." For a quarter of the £100 million which he wasted, the army could have had everything which it wanted.⁷⁵ This interpretation demonstrates that Fuller had turned against Churchill's historical reputation completely, not simply his reputation as Britain's wartime leader. He followed up this verdict the following year with an even more caustic statement:

My opinion of Churchill is that he is the greatest mountebank since Nero.... Like Nero he is an expert in turning summersaults in the arena, in short a highly popular clown, who in the Press has been transformed into a supreme artist. Nero, however, had the better of him in that he committed suicide when comparatively young: that, at least, was a decent act.⁷⁶

Even more interesting are the remarks made about Churchill in 1956 in the third volume of Fuller's *Decisive Battles of the Western World*, as his criticism is not restricted to the Second World War. In discussing the ill-fated Gallipoli operation, he referred to Churchill's obsession with the idea. His judgement was scathing: "As a problem of pure strategy the idea was brilliant. But without a powerful Greek army to back it, it was amateurish, because England was not capable of fighting on two fronts, and the British Army was neither equipped nor trained to fight in a theatre such as Gallipoli." He accused Churchill of having become "hypnotized" by the prize, so that he "forced his Dardanelles card on the Government," thus pushing them into "a campaign which in the end proved as disastrous as that of Saratoga."⁷⁷ This portrayal of the then First Lord of the Admiralty as an

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 400-02.

74. Although the book was published in 1948, the manuscript appears to have been finished the previous year, as Fuller's preface is dated 1 September 1947. Fuller, *Second World War*, p. viii.

75. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/302/362, Fuller to Liddell Hart, 5 November 1948.

76. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/302/418, Fuller to Liddell Hart, 7 September 1949.

77. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Western World and their Influence upon History*, Vol. III, *From the American Civil War to the End of the Second World War*

amateur strategist was important because it provided a basis for the main attack on the reputation of Churchill as warlord in the Second World War.

In actual fact, in the chapter on "The Rise of the Third Reich" there is still a clear hint of Fascism in what Fuller writes.⁷⁸ This brief chapter is not only interesting because it calls into question Churchill's version of events in the 1930s in volume one of his six-volume history of the war. It also shows why Fuller's critique failed to attract the intellectual attention it probably merited: his interpretation could be easily dismissed because of his, at times, apparent sympathy for the fascist project. This can be explained in part by the way in which the three-volume study of decisive battles had derived from an earlier two-volume work, written in 1939 and 1940, which was heavily laced with elements of Fuller's interwar fascist leanings.⁷⁹ Moreover, at a time when Britain was still celebrating its "finest hour" against the Nazi war machine, there were simply too many nuances in Fuller's version of events to make it palatable to the general public.

The references to Churchill's performance in the Second World War are interesting because Fuller does not concentrate on the strategic bombing campaign, rather on grand strategy on land and at sea. Beginning with the Battle of France, he noted that towards the end of June 1940, there was "a dreamland of political fantasy" which mainly "emanated from the fertile brain of Mr. Churchill," mocking at the same time the Prime Minister's declaration of an "indissoluble union" of Britain and France.⁸⁰ Predictably, he is critical of the alliance with Russia, arguing that "Mr. Churchill should not have impulsively thrown himself into the arms of the Soviets, but should have paused until Stalin had sought his aid." At that moment there should have been a demand that the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939 be annulled.⁸¹ Fuller goes on to repeat his criticism of the policy of unconditional surrender, Churchill's muddle-headed approach to the selection of objectives after the war in Africa had been won, the bombing of German cities, coupled with a scathing attack on his "victory at all costs" approach, which was the negation of policy, and his "blind trust in Russia's motives," which could only be explained by his, and Roosevelt's, ignorance of the country's history.⁸²

Fuller's final historical verdict on Churchill was presented in 1961 in his popular survey of warfare, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961*. Here many of his earlier points were repeated, but in a slightly milder form. Thus, his criticism of the Gallipoli operation did not contain the same level of bite as it

(London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956), pp. 233-35.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 364-76.

79. J.F.C. Fuller, *Decisive Battles*, Vol. I, *From Alexander the Great to Frederick the Great* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939); *idem*, *Decisive Battles*, Vol. II, *From Napoleon the First to General Franco* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1940).

80. Fuller, *Decisive Battles of the Western World*, Vol. III (1956), pp. 407-08.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 449-50, 479.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 507-09, 514-16, 544-52, 558-61, 630-32.

had in 1956, since he noted that the "masterful spirit among these would-be escapists was Mr. Churchill." He also mentioned "the forceful oratory of Mr. Churchill" which "persuaded the War Council to accept the project in the form of a naval bombardment." If the attacks on Churchill were less intense, Fuller still considered Gallipoli to have been "escapist strategy," thus providing a platform from which to question Churchill's entire approach to grand strategy during the Second World War.⁸³

In considering the war, Fuller adopted a new line of attack, at the same time defending Neville Chamberlain. He argued that Baldwin had so neglected defense that Chamberlain, when he became Prime Minister on 28 May 1937, "had no military backing to his diplomacy." As an alternative to appeasement, Churchill had advocated an alliance with Russia, but this had been "repugnant" to Chamberlain, a repugnance shared by Fuller. In fact, in Fuller's view, Chamberlain had assessed Stalin's intentions more realistically than Churchill. And, he quoted from a speech by Churchill in the House of Commons on the outbreak of war to the effect that the war was neither for Poland nor Danzig, but was a struggle against good and evil. For Fuller, this "crusade of righteousness" set the tone for the rest of the war. Moreover, it was at this point in his narrative that he made plain his scepticism of the soundness of Churchill's strategic judgment. After he became First Lord of the Admiralty on 3 September 1939, "he was soon engaged at his old game of devising diversionary sideshows."⁸⁴

Fuller pointed out that Churchill's "next diversionary side show" was the Narvik expedition which caused the Chamberlain administration to collapse, leaving the way open for "the cause of the collapse" to become Prime Minister and Minister of Defence on 10 May 1940.⁸⁵ To be fair, a form of balance was achieved in the statement that:

Churchill was a man cast in the heroic mould, a berserker ever ready to lead a forlorn hope or storm a breach, and at his best when things were at their worst. His glamorous rhetoric, his pugnacity, and his insistence on annihilating the enemy appealed to human instincts, and made him an outstanding war leader, which was the greatest of his contributions to his country.⁸⁶

Yet this positive summary was then tempered by quotations from several British generals, who had pointed to Churchill's inability to see the whole strategic picture and, to make matters worse, his obstinacy when faced with facts which showed a scheme he had set his heart on to be ill-advised. And, Fuller rounded off his criticism with his central point that for Churchill

83. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and its Conduct* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), pp. 161-65.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-52.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

86. *Ibid.*

victory very quickly became an end in itself as opposed to a means to an end.⁸⁷

Subsequent references to Churchill in the book show him to have been: amazed at the speed with which the Allied armies collapsed in France in May 1940; unable to exploit the German invasion of Russia to prolong the war to Britain's advantage; guilty of sacrificing Poland in the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 26 May 1942; unwilling to aid the German resistance to Hitler; and, incapable of exploiting the opportunity of demanding the nullification of the Soviet-German Pact of 1939 and the release of all Polish prisoners and deported Poles from Soviet captivity.⁸⁸ Beyond war aims and Churchill's failure to recognize the threat of Communism after the conflict, Fuller also passed judgement again on the strategic bombing of Germany. He argued that, while in the First World War Churchill had understood the role of aircraft as a means of support for the main battle, in the Second Bomber Command became the Prime Minister's "private army."⁸⁹ To round off this damning verdict, Fuller accused Churchill of having been partly responsible for the Russian domination of Europe by the close of the war, but oblivious as to his own part "in bringing this calamitous situation about."⁹⁰

The final salvo of Fuller's critique of Churchill and Roosevelt in *The Conduct of War* was, even in 1961, controversial – something of which he was only too aware. Writing to his American editors at Rutgers University Press, he commented that his publishers in England had been alarmed at some passages in the book and that he had undertaken to recast the section on "President Roosevelt's pro-Soviet Policy, so as to avoid as far as I can unnecessarily offending my American readers."⁹¹ In fact, while working on the final amendments he noted: "I am well aware that my strictures on the conduct of World War II by Roosevelt and Churchill will arouse considerable opposition on the part of not a few readers." But he added that, while they "were no doubt honest and patriotic men... the present world indigestion is to be attributed to their defective cookery."⁹² Fuller's views were not simply controversial for the sake of creating a stir; he was convinced that wartime policies had had a disastrous effect on the postwar world order.

Fuller's Critique in Historical Context

An interpretation of the historical significance of Fuller's critique of Churchill depends, naturally, upon a consideration of the views which were dominant during the war and in the decade and a half after its conclusion. At

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-55.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60, 265-66.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-87.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 303-04.

91. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 3, file 34, Fuller to Sloane, 3 February 1961.

92. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 3, file 34, Fuller to Helen Stewart, 31 January 1961.

first glance, the published wartime assessments of Churchill's leadership suggest that Fuller was one of only a small number of voices offering any serious criticism. In one wartime biography, it was stated: "The vigilance and judgment of Churchill were equal to all situations." And, in the final paragraph, written needless to say under the pressures of the situation in 1941, it was proclaimed that "Britain had at last found dauntless, incomparable leadership." Moreover: "The free discipline of the British responded generously to a Churchill, for the people saw in him the embodiment of all that was noble in their history and the finest qualities in their race."⁹³

It is interesting that in the United States, too, wartime propaganda very quickly worked its way into otherwise thoughtful assessments. In a book published in 1941, H.A. de Weerd commented in a biographical sketch of Churchill that he was to reach his lifelong goal of becoming Prime Minister "only at a moment when the military fortunes of the British Empire were at the very bottom of the abyss." But there was no mention of Churchill's culpability in the fiasco of the Norwegian Campaign. Rightly referring to the galvanizing effect of Churchill's personality in 1940 after the Fall of France, de Weerd nonetheless credits Churchill's various strategic moves in 1941 as having forced Hitler to engage in a two-front war by invading Russia. While even suggesting that he might not remain Prime Minister until the end of the war, he confirmed the view held by some in the United States, even in 1941, that Churchill's talents were "military rather than political."⁹⁴

One indication of the reticence to criticize Churchill in print during the war is provided by Basil Liddell Hart, who, according to Brian Bond, was a critic of strategic bombing and the policy of unconditional surrender, while he is also claimed to have "maintained a consistently critical attitude towards British and Allied policy throughout the Second World War."⁹⁵ There is certainly no doubt that Liddell Hart was – in his private correspondence, that is – a critic of the initiation of the bombing of Germany by the British, describing it as "the depth of stupidity," while he was clearly in sympathy with those who were suspicious of Churchill as a war leader.⁹⁶ Yet, in his published articles during the war there is no criticism of Britain's Prime

93. R.H. Kiernan, *Churchill* (London: George Harrap, 1942), pp. 209-10. A similar tone can be found in Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *Churchill: The Making of a Hero* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1942).

94. H.A. de Weerd, *Great Soldiers of the Two World Wars* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941), pp. 184-88.

95. Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 1977), pp. 119-63.

96. This comes across strongly in his correspondence with Bishop George Bell. See here LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/58/7, Liddell Hart to Bell, 16 November 1940, LH 1/58/13, Bell to Liddell Hart, 3 December 1940, LH 1/58/20, Liddell Hart to Bell, 7 May 1941, LH 1/58/49, Bell to Liddell Hart, 4 January 1944, and LH 1/58/50, Liddell Hart to Bell, 4 January 1944. On Bell, see: Ronald C.D. Jasper, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); and, Kenneth Slack, *George Bell* (London: SCM Press, 1971).

Minister at all, while anything approaching criticism of strategic bombing cannot be found either.⁹⁷ The only genuinely critical wartime manuscript on unconditional surrender in his papers was either rejected by newspaper editors, or not submitted.⁹⁸

Naturally, while the war was raging, journalists and writers could be forgiven for any unwillingness to question Churchill's military abilities. Yet, works published shortly after the end of the war were, in many ways, even less critical, as they tended to interpret the final outcome of events as having vindicated all the Prime Minister's strategic decisions.⁹⁹ The voices of criticism remained largely restricted to those on the left, such as the postwar Labour MP, Emrys Hughes,¹⁰⁰ whose 1950 book on Churchill highlighted his *volte face* on Bolshevism, as well as taking up the idea that the policy of unconditional surrender had prolonged the war.¹⁰¹ But there is no doubt that one major factor in the positive views on Churchill was because he himself did all he could to influence the writing of the history of his wartime performance by building his own history of the war on privileged access to official documents.¹⁰² And, what is particularly revealing is that of the thirty-nine separate contributions to the commemorative work *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*, there was not a single assessment of the wartime Prime Minister as a strategist, despite three separate chapters covering his relationship with the army, navy, and air force.¹⁰³

It is noteworthy, however, that military opinion in Britain was quite tolerant towards Fuller's interpretation of the Second World War, as the reviews which appeared in *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institu-*

97. See, for instance, B.H. Liddell Hart, "This is Strategic Bombing," *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1944, which offers a purely descriptive account of bombing; and, also idem, "After the Verdict," *The Leader*, 24 February 1945.

98. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 10/1944/52, BHLH, The Price of "Unconditional Surrender," 7 December 1944. See also earlier, more imprecise, thoughts, to be found in, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereinafter BOL), Gilbert Murray Papers, MS 150, fol.48, BHLH, The Background to "Unconditional Surrender," typescript, 31 July 1943.

99. A typical example is Malcolm Thomson, *The Life and Times of Winston Churchill* (London: Odhams, 1945), pp. 233-317.

100. Emrys Hughes (1894-1969), Member of Parliament for South Ayrshire, 1946-1969, who authored a biography of Keir Hardie in 1956, whose daughter he had married in 1924. He had been a conscientious objector in the First World War. He also published a biography of Harold Macmillan in 1962.

101. Emrys Hughes, *Winston Churchill in War and Peace* (Glasgow: Unity Publishing, 1950), esp. chs. XXV and XXIX; it is interesting to note that on p. 204 he quotes from a wartime article by Fuller from the *Sunday Pictorial* which attacked the policy of unconditional surrender in the strongest terms.

102. Reynolds, *In Command of History*, passim, but esp. pp. 23-35, 49-63.

103. Lieutenant General H.G. Martin, "Churchill and the Army," Admiral Sir William M. James, "Churchill and the Navy," and Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté, "Churchill the Airman," in Eade, ed., *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*, pp. 7-22, 88-101, 102-13. All three chapters cover Churchill's involvement in the three services prior to September 1939 and only deal with the Second World War in the most cursory fashion.

tion make clear. The review of *The Second World War* acknowledged that it was "a lively and provocative book." Even if readers did not agree with Fuller, "they will be provoked to much useful thought and study to find the answers to his arguments." Still, the review ended with the observation: "One would put this book down with a rather happier feeling if the criticism of individuals had been less caustic." It was observed that Churchill and Roosevelt had been "severely handled," the reviewer admonishing that proper allowance needed to be made for the decision-makers at the time since they lacked knowledge of the enemy's plans.¹⁰⁴ Ironically, the third volume of *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, the book which was perhaps most objectionable given its decidedly fascist tone, attracted no criticism at all in the review in the journal. The critique of Churchill is not mentioned, indeed the book was recommended to students at the Staff College, Camberley.¹⁰⁵ In the review of *The Conduct of War*, there was no disapproving tone towards his critique of Churchill and Roosevelt; in fact, the chapters on the strategic bombing of Germany and unconditional surrender were considered to be particularly fascinating.¹⁰⁶

It was not just military officers who found Fuller's analysis of the Second World War appealing. A leading critic of Churchill, Francis Neilson,¹⁰⁷ identified Fuller's 1948 book on the history of the war as one of four works which he thought were essential reading on the Fall of France, and which provided a corrective to the second volume of Churchill's history of the war.¹⁰⁸ In his reviews of each of Churchill's six volumes in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, he had been determined to highlight the inaccuracies in his portrayal of the war. In his review of the third volume, *The Grand Alliance*, he commented that he always recommended Fuller's history of the war as it could "be understood by an ordinary, intelligent citizen." Echoing Fuller's criticism of the Prime Minister's alleged confusion over war aims, he pointed out that in the eleventh chapter the author had given "us a much-needed lesson on war and what its purpose should be." This endorsement was rounded off by a remark on "the sanity of thought and vision to be found in its pages."¹⁰⁹

104. Anon. review of *The Second World War, 1939-1945*, *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 93 (August 1948), pp. 501-02.

105. Anon. review of *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, Vol. III, *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 101 (November 1956), p. 620.

106. Anon. review of *The Conduct of War*, *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 106 (November 1961), pp. 602-03.

107. Francis Neilson (1867-1961) was the author of over sixty books; he was also an actor, playwright, and stage director; he moved from Britain to the United States, aged eighteen. He subsequently returned to Britain and served as a Member of Parliament, 1910-1916. He resigned from parliament due to his pacifist beliefs during the First World War and returned to the United States.

108. Review of Winston Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (1949), reproduced in Francis Neilson, *The Churchill Legend* (Appelton, WI: Nelson, 1954), p. 389.

109. Review of Winston Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (1950), reproduced in Neilson,

Needless to say, Fuller did not come off quite so lightly when it came to reviews in other journals and newspapers. He wrote to William Sloane at Rutgers University Press in early 1962 that the American reviews of *The Conduct of War* which he had received had generally been more appreciative than the British, although he added that, rather strangely, "one of the best appeared in 'Peace News,' the leading pacifist paper in this country."¹¹⁰ A review published by one of Fuller's long-time supporters in the United States, Leo A. Codd, pointed towards the unfriendly reaction the book had provoked in some quarters in Britain. He referred to "muddle-headed reviewers," who had found "the Fuller doctrine exasperating," and criticized an unnamed professor who had accused Fuller of being a "willing victim of German propaganda," but without referring to any specific section in the book.¹¹¹

The reviews which volume three of his study of "decisive battles" and *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961* received in the decidedly liberal *Times Literary Supplement* largely side-stepped his opinion of Churchill. The review of the former did talk of his "prejudices" when it came to his assessment of leadership and especially statesmanship, referring to his indictment of leadership in total war as "fierce and contemptuous." But while there was a discussion of his critique of Roosevelt, which was considered to be "at times exaggerated," his attacks on Churchill were not mentioned; in fact, the reviewer thought the book to be a "major work."¹¹² In the review of the latter, although it was noted that something of Fuller's "old authoritarian background remained," the book was nonetheless treated positively and as "thought-provoking." Moreover, there was a willingness to acknowledge that his arguments about the "appeasement" of Russia during the Second World War had some validity, even if the reviewer was anxious to point out the distinction made by Fuller between the appeasement of Churchill as opposed to Roosevelt.¹¹³

Still, one of the best indicators of just how controversial Fuller's views were, even in 1961, can be gleaned from the correspondence about the manuscript for *The Conduct of War* between Fuller and his British and American publishers. Maurice Temple Smith of Eyre and Spottiswoode wrote to Fuller in February 1961, after he had read the manuscript, and noted that, while many of his points were minor, "the most important of them concern your remarks on Churchill and Roosevelt." The sentence which seems to have annoyed Fuller the most was underlined by him: "What seems

Churchill Legend, p. 410.

110. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/6/19, Fuller to Sloane, n.d. [1962].

111. Leo A. Codd, review of *The Conduct of War*, *Ordnance* 46 (January/February 1962), pp. 578-79.

112. "War in Our Time," review of *Decisive Battles of the Western World*, Vol. III, *Times Literary Supplement* 55 (20 July 1956), p. 431.

113. "Arms and the Soldier," review of *The Conduct of War*, *Times Literary Supplement* 60 (17 November 1961), p. 820.

to me important is not whether your interpretation will eventually prove the correct one, but that most readers at the present time will not accept it." Temple Smith argued that if Churchill was still alive when the book was published he thought he might sue the publisher successfully for libel. He was prepared to concede that, were Fuller to have his general arguments accepted, he was going to have to "puncture the claims of Churchill's idolaters." Moreover, he was prepared to acknowledge the necessity of pointing out that Churchill, "although a brilliant man, was also often erratic and emotional, and that when involved in a combat he often engaged in it with such zest that he forgot the ends for which the combat was entered." But he warned Fuller sharply about the dangers of making "anything which could be taken as a personal attack."¹¹⁴

Temple Smith devoted an entire paragraph to warning about Fuller's assault on Roosevelt, which he also considered to be far too personal. While he thought a critique of his wartime policy was "legitimate and necessary for your argument," in the form of a personal attack it was "most dangerous." He warned that in the case of Fuller's belief that Roosevelt had provoked Japan into attacking America at Pearl Harbor, this view was "by no means universally held." He added that American sources of information on the issue differed and tended to "align themselves so strongly with the political opinions of the writer that one has to treat all of them with the greatest reserve." He also complained that all the sources on Roosevelt cited by Fuller were "violent opponents." Temple Smith did accept that Roosevelt had felt more sympathy for Communism than Nazism which had led him to make settlements which favored the Russians after the war. He emphasized, though, that it would support Fuller's argument far more if he simply portrayed both Roosevelt and Churchill as honest politicians who had committed the "cardinal error of forgetting that the end of war is policy." He concluded that the publisher's reader had made the same points, adding that he simply wanted to prevent Fuller from alienating any reader unnecessarily.¹¹⁵

The American publisher of *The Conduct of War*, Rutgers University Press, reported that the American reader had not provided the type of detailed editorial comments which Temple Smith had.¹¹⁶ Fuller then wrote to both publishers to say that he had accepted all of the suggestions, at least in modified form, and in particular had recast the section on Roosevelt's policy.¹¹⁷ Writing to William Sloane at Rutgers, however, Fuller thought the reaction of Temple Smith "a bit exaggerated"; yet he accepted that there probably was personal animosity in his views and he agreed to tone down some passages. But he lamented that "so many English publishers continue to live in a kind of Victorian hangover – it is bad manners to criticize the

114. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/6/7, Maurice Temple Smith to Fuller, 2 February 1961.

115. Ibid.

116. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/6/10, Stewart to Fuller, 28 February 1961.

117. LHCMA, Fuller Papers, IV/6/11, Fuller to Eyre & Spottiswoode/Rutgers University Press, 2 March 1961.

squire." He thought that "Great historical characters, like Churchill and Roosevelt, are big enough men to take a lot of punches," and in delivering those punches he asserted that "it will certainly do history no harm."¹¹⁸ Still, the differences between the reactions at Eyre and Spottiswoode and Rutgers University Press do suggest that the British were more sensitive in 1961 to attacks on Churchill and Roosevelt than Americans were.

There is a final question which remains on Fuller's views, namely, did his attacks on Churchill and his wartime policies have any impact upon other historians? A most revealing route into this question is through the writings of Basil Liddell Hart. While he made no direct criticisms of Churchill during the war, he was plainly aware of Fuller's newspaper articles: not only had he revived his friendship with Fuller in July 1942 after the latter had severed relations in 1937,¹¹⁹ he recommended approvingly one of his most critical articles in the *Evening Standard* to Bishop George Bell in February 1944.¹²⁰ Having taken inspiration from Fuller's writings in the interwar period, it seems that he started to take inspiration from him once again after the war, not least of all as Fuller regularly sent him copies of his books and articles.¹²¹ One sign of Fuller's influence is the way in which he started to adopt his language when referring to Churchill, writing in October 1946 of the way in which "our so-called 'leaders' pathetically drift in a Churchillian mental fog."¹²²

The first indication of Liddell Hart's new-found willingness to criticize the Prime Minister's performance as a strategist during the war was in several newspaper articles published in 1947. The first of these pieces called into question the wisdom of Britain's wartime policy of encouraging guerrilla operations. There was no direct criticism of Churchill, but he stated that it was a policy which had appealed to the Prime Minister's "mind and temperament."¹²³ Having tested the water, there then followed two articles which appeared in both the *Sunday Pictorial* and the *Sunday Independent* towards the end of the year. The first piece took issue with Churchill's decision in 1941 to attempt to block German designs on Greece. He challenged the

118. SCUA Rutgers, Fuller Papers, box 3, file 34, Fuller to Stewart, 3 March 1961.

119. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/302/283-4, Liddell Hart to Fuller, 9 and 19 July 1942.

120. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/58/54, Liddell Hart to Bell, 12 February 1944, recommending Fuller's article, "The Barbarity of War without Rules" (4 February 1944), and LH 1/58/55, Bell to Liddell Hart, 19 February 1944, which indicates Bell had already read it, showing also the appeal of Fuller's writings to left-wingers and pacifists.

121. In October 1946, for instance, Fuller sent him the English edition of *Armament and History*. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/302/326, Fuller to Liddell Hart, 15 October 1946.

122. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 2/302/327, Liddell Hart to Fuller, 17 October 1946.

123. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Resistance Movements Not Worth While?" *Sunday Independent*, 26 January 1947. Similar versions were published in the *Glasgow Herald*, 24 January 1947, and *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 January 1947.

official version that the British had acted upon a Greek request for assistance, arguing that "Churchill's eagerness outran the practical possibilities."¹²⁴ In the second piece, Liddell Hart finally came out into the open against unconditional surrender. The critique was close to the essence of Fuller's arguments, even if somewhat diluted: unconditional surrender had lengthened the war, it had increased the cost of the occupation of Germany, and it had led to Soviet predominance in Europe.¹²⁵

The first real attempt at a critique of Churchill the war leader, of the intensity of that practised by Fuller in his immediate postwar writings, was undertaken in a review of the first volume of Churchill's memoirs. This was published in the *Oxford Mail*, *Nottingham Journal*, and *Yorkshire Observer* on 4 October 1948, significantly, after Fuller's history of the Second World War had appeared. What is particularly noteworthy is that the *Oxford Mail* felt the need to publish a eulogy of Churchill in the column next to the review. First it was doubted whether historians in the future would "be able to recapture fully the inspiration of his leadership in those days." While it was conceded that Churchill had made mistakes, anyone would have made these under the pressure of their responsibilities at that time. But several examples were given of "his far-sighted genius and courage."¹²⁶ The editor was clearly fearful of the type of reaction which Liddell Hart's review might provoke.

The review was, in fact, an opportunity for Liddell Hart to attempt to justify his own record in the interwar period. Unlike Fuller, he did not go straight for the jugular. He thought that had Churchill been in power earlier Britain might have been spared much. Yet his compliments were always qualified, such as in the statement: "Mr. Churchill is a wonderful man, shining out from the gloom of an age of mediocrity. He not only compels admiration by his virtuosity, but inspires affection despite his intense egocentricity." Liddell Hart noted that Churchill had failed to see the dangers of allowing Japan and Italy to flout the League of Nations, while he also considered that his sympathy for the Francoists in the Spanish Civil War had blinded him to the dangers of German and Italian involvement; he even criticized his endorsement of the "impracticable guarantee to Poland," made without Russia's support. Despite the many positive aspects he identified in Churchill's leadership, he asserted that "his dynamism is too strong for his statesmanship."¹²⁷

The technique of using reviews of Churchill's memoirs to provide a critical assessment of his performance as grand strategist was one which

124. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Riddles of the War (2): Famous Men – And the Great Greek Blunder," *Sunday Pictorial*, 12 October 1947.

125. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Two Words: The War's Greatest Blunder," *Sunday Pictorial*, 7 December 1947, p. 11.

126. "Editorial: Winston," *Oxford Mail*, 4 October 1948.

127. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Churchill's Story: A Dauntless but a Dazzled Mind," *Oxford Mail*, 4 October 1948.

Liddell Hart was able to continue with his considerations of volumes three and four. In some respects, his review of volume three, which dealt with 1941, was milder than his first review. He argued that Churchill realized certain plans would fail before they had been enacted, whereas his political and military advisers had not. In the case of the dispatch of the British force to Greece, Churchill had yielded to his advisers. But while he displayed "boldness" in the Middle East, he had displayed "a relative blindness over the Far East."¹²⁸ In his review of volume four, Liddell Hart continued to employ a combination of back-handed compliments directed towards Churchill's abilities as an historian, together with suggestions that he had often been right where his Chiefs of Staff had been wrong. Yet, there is criticism of his removal of Auchinleck, his school-boy like delight at being in charge, as if "the war was a great game produced for his benefit," while the historical treatment by Churchill of the Casablanca conference allowed Liddell Hart the opportunity to take another swipe at the policy of unconditional surrender.¹²⁹ The review of volume four was, in fact, too much for one journalist, who took Liddell Hart to task in an article in the *Yorkshire Post*, which then led to two subsequent exchanges between both men in the columns of the paper.¹³⁰

Liddell Hart's critique was not repeated again until an article appeared in *Encounter* in 1966, which drew heavily on his previous reviews of Churchill's war memoirs. With several obvious nuances, it largely repeated his immediate postwar line of attack, which had drawn much of its inspiration from Fuller. With unconditional surrender at the center of the discussion, Churchill was portrayed as a man who became obsessed with one problem and then forgot the wider picture. He concluded: "A man may be successful as a tactician without that capacity for 'comparison,' and the sense of proportion from which it springs – but he will be almost certain to go astray as a strategist and still more as a grand strategist."¹³¹ Three years later, another piece on Churchill as a military strategist appeared in a high-profile volume, once again repeating many of the points made in his memoir reviews, in particular, "the impression that his actual influence was much less than is commonly supposed."¹³² The final historical critique by Liddell Hart could be found in his *History of the Second World War*, which appeared in the year of his death 1970. In this, one of his best-selling books,

128. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Looking over Churchill's Shoulder," *The Listener*, 27 July 1950.

129. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Mr. Churchill's Fourth Volume," *The Listener*, 9 August 1951.

130. WLA, "The Yapping at Mr. Churchill," *Yorkshire Post*, 14 August 1951, with letters from Liddell Hart published together with WLA's replies on 25 August and 1 September 1951.

131. B.H. Liddell Hart, "Churchill in War: A Study of His Capacity and Performance in the Military Sphere," *Encounter* 26 (April 1966), pp. 14-22, quote, 22.

132. Liddell Hart, "Military Strategist," esp. pp. 196-97. In a review of the book, Churchill's former Private Secretary judged that Liddell Hart had given Churchill "more credit than has often been allowed him for World War I and less than his due for World War II." J.R. Colville, "Churchill's Way," *Sunday Times*, 13 April 1969.

there were watered-down versions of his previous postwar assessments.¹³³

Liddell Hart was certainly one of the most well-known critics of Winston Churchill. It is important, however, that his writings be considered rather than his own comments on them. In March 1946, he thought that there was "still some prejudice against me in various Oxford circles because of the views I published earlier in the war about the futility of pursuing victory, and insisting on unconditional surrender."¹³⁴ Such an interpretation was, at best, optimistic; and, as we have seen, his first clear published comments were made in 1947, or, arguably, even as late as 1948.¹³⁵ It seems beyond doubt, then, that, while he was critical of strategic bombing and unconditional surrender during the war in his private correspondence, the connection he made between these policies and Churchill's wartime leadership first found their way into his postwar historical reflections as a result of Fuller's writings both during and after the war.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Where then does this assessment of Fuller's critique of Winston Churchill as a grand strategist leave us? What is beyond dispute is that Fuller did meet with Churchill during the Great War and the interwar period often enough that he was able to form a fairly clear view of his character, at the very least in military questions. It has been demonstrated that Fuller underwent a remarkable transformation in his attitude towards Churchill, a transition from admiration to contempt, which would appear to have begun before the outbreak of war, reaching its culmination point at some time towards the end of 1944. But can this simply be explained by the arguments offered by Brian

133. B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), esp. pp. 15, 20, 51-59, 151-52.

134. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/58/77, Liddell Hart to Bell, 17 March 1946. The context to this comment was his application for the Chichele Professorship in the History of War at All Souls College, Oxford, which he made the following month. See BOL, Murray Papers, MS 150, fol.65, Liddell Hart to Murray, 10 April 1946, and, fol.66-78, Liddell Hart to the Registrar, University of Oxford, 9 April 1946, enclosing his application.

135. It should be noted, though, that there are some non-conformist remarks about the conduct of the war in B.H. Liddell Hart, *This Expanding War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1942), esp. pp. 185-89, although only on p. 265 do we find a touch of negativity about Churchill.

136. A further argument which strengthens this interpretation is that Liddell Hart was only really a passing acquaintance of Churchill, so did not possess the personal insight which Fuller did. While there were repeated attempts to cultivate Churchill in the interwar period, these were politely rebuffed. A lunch was arranged in February 1928, but the only instance when Liddell Hart was invited into Churchill's political circle was at the time of the Munich crisis. See LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/171/1-31, with the invitation to lunch at LH 1/171/5, Edward Marsh to Liddell Hart, 29 February 1928, and LH 1/171/29, for an invitation to a lunch at the Savoy Hotel, 29 September 1938, and LH 1/171/30, for an invite to an evening meeting, 29 September 1938. This lack of closer knowledge of Churchill may have meant that Liddell Hart lacked the confidence to attack the wartime Prime Minister in print.

Holden Reid and A.J. Trythall that, on the one hand, Fuller was attracted to "unpopular causes" and, on the other, that Churchill was a symbol for Fuller of Britain's policy of unconditional surrender and strategic bombing?

In the first instance, Holden Reid is certainly correct that Fuller, as a writer at any rate, knew that adopting unpopular interpretations attracted attention and, hence, sold books. But in the case of his attacks on Churchill it is only a partial explanation because of the extent of Fuller's animosity. Furthermore, Trythall seems incorrect in his judgement because, although Fuller was a severe critic of unconditional surrender and strategic bombing,¹³⁷ these were but two of several dimensions to his attacks on the grand strategy of Britain's wartime Prime Minister. In order to understand the Fuller critique we must consider what were, in fact, five main strands: first, there was his personal attitude to Churchill, which was bound up with how he had wanted to see British politics develop in the 1930s; second, there was the influence of Churchill on the home front and the management of the war effort; third, there was Fuller's understanding of his psyche and personality; fourth, there were specific strategic decisions made by Churchill; and, fifth, there were Churchill's major wartime strategic policies.

To take the first point, Fuller's initial admiration of Churchill was largely bound up with his experience of the role he played as Minister of Munitions during the First World War. Fuller believed that the British Army's GHQ obstructed new ideas and that it required a strong civilian to overcome the barriers erected by military conservatives. There are even hints between the lines in a 1918 memorandum to Churchill that he wished to suggest he saw him as a potential, strong-arm, wartime leader, combining military and political roles.¹³⁸ It may well have been, then, that in the turbulent 1930s Fuller looked to Churchill to provide a bridge between the Conservative Party and the extreme right and create some form of semi-dictatorial government so that the strong leadership he craved could be asserted. That this did not take place at the moment Fuller thought it most necessary may well have fueled his bitterness towards Churchill.

It was both ironic and typical of Fuller that once the sweeping measures required to steer the nation towards total war were introduced he started to complain about them. Almost in the spirit of George Orwell, he had in February 1944 lamented the regimentation in British life which had put the nation in "barracks, on airfields or in workshops – the trinity of total war."¹³⁹ It is this apparent oscillation between left and right which lends his writing its stimulating quality and fascination. There was also a very definite

137. His views on strategic bombing also informed his post-1945 military theories on new technology and atomic weapons. See Alaric Searle, "Was There a 'Boney' Fuller after 1945? Major-General J.F.C. Fuller as Military Theorist and Commentator, 1945-1966," *War in History* 11 (July 2004), pp. 327-57.

138. TMARL, Fuller Papers, Private Journal, A12, memorandum by Fuller sent to Churchill, 2 March 1918, Churchill to Fuller, 8 March 1918.

139. Fuller, "Danger in a New Socialism," *Evening Standard*, 18 February 1944.

military dimension to his critique: namely, he clearly disapproved of the concentration of so much decision-making power in Churchill's hands when he became Minister of Defence at the same time as holding the office of Prime Minister. While some historians have judged this as a strength in the management of Britain's war effort, senior officers at the time were frustrated and driven to despair by Churchill's working methods.¹⁴⁰

When it came to Churchill's personality, Fuller was certainly well placed to comment on the Prime Minister's foibles. Indeed, he was not only astute but understood better than most what made Churchill tick. In an era when he was praised as the war leader with a sure grasp of grand strategy, Fuller commented cuttingly on his impulsiveness which, he implied, showed that his military leadership was unsound. This linked in with the fourth strand of his critique, namely his questioning of a number of the individual decisions made by Churchill, which Fuller judged to be deeply flawed. Undoubtedly, his most biting criticism of Churchillian strategy was in relation to the Italian Campaign. Here Fuller was perhaps too strident as, after all, the campaign did draw vital German resources away from the Eastern Front and northern France. Yet, again, Fuller was instinctively arguing along the right lines, insofar as Churchill's initial intention had been quite different because he had assumed that Italy would collapse, but had not anticipated the speed of the German response.¹⁴¹

Finally, was Fuller's critique of the policies of strategic bombing and unconditional surrender actually his major point of attack, with Churchill merely forming the convenient symbol for these two policies – as has been argued by Trythall? Here the answer must be negative: Fuller held Churchill and Roosevelt personally accountable for unconditional surrender, while the responsibility for strategic bombing was laid firmly at the British Prime Minister's door. The other points already raised – his own personal bitterness towards Churchill, as well as his deep suspicion of his qualities as a grand strategist – all contributed to the venom with which he attacked strategic bombing and unconditional surrender. Based on his understanding of Clausewitz, it was Churchill's responsibility to tailor the means of winning the war to achievable postwar goals. It is precisely because his assault on these policies was based on a number of other considerations in relation to Churchill's wartime role as supreme strategist that he was so pronounced in

140. See here the discussion in Keegan, "Churchill's Strategy," pp. 328-33, who highlights succinctly the positive dimensions of Churchill's management of the war. However, it seems that historical opinion now supports Fuller on this specific point. Richard Overy has stated: "It is difficult not to conclude that Allied strategy succeeded despite Churchill, though his pugnacity and spirit remained a valuable symbol of the Allied will to win." Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 268.

141. For background on Churchill's strategy for the Italian campaign and the historical controversy surrounding it, see: Ben-Moshe, *Churchill*, pp. 197-224; Reynolds, *In Command of History*, pp. 373-88; and, Brian Holden Reid, "The Italian Campaign, 1943-45: A Reappraisal of Allied Generalship," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 13 (March 1990), pp. 128-61.

his criticism.¹⁴²

Nonetheless, it ought to be clear that Fuller's interpretation was often one-sided, as a number of reviewers of his books pointed out. The flaw in Fuller's argument can in part be explained by the last traces of fascist thought which can be identified in the third volume of his *Decisive Battles of the Western World*. His failure to recognize, or at least to play down, the racial policies of annihilation pursued by Hitler's National Socialist regime undermined much of his argument. His alternative strategy, which he proposed in *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961*, would have been to allow Bolshevism and National Socialism to "cripple each other," and would have – so the argument went – given Britain the time she needed to re-arm and then intervene on the side of the nation which was on the back-foot.¹⁴³ This was, in effect, the old nineteenth century "balance of power" outlook, but one which had been developed in an era before the totalitarian extremes. Nonetheless, it could not be dismissed entirely out of hand, at least, that is, before the true nature of the Nazi policies of racial destruction had become known beyond the confines of intelligence agencies.

What Fuller sought to advocate was favored by many British officers before the outbreak of war, as can be seen in a letter sent by Major General George Lindsay to Major General Archibald Wavell in November 1936. In a discussion of Wavell's visit to the Soviet Union in September of that year, Lindsay offered the view that if Germany attacked the USSR, whatever the outcome, she would receive "a pretty good mauling." He thought that war between the two dictatorships "would be quite ruthless," so that once it was over, neither side would be in a position to take on anyone else. Hence, he argued, "I feel we must keep out of this war as long as we possibly can."¹⁴⁴ The problem was that the nature of Nazi extermination policies changed the implications of such a stance. While far less of what we now know about Nazi extermination policies was known in the 1950s, enough had come out at the Nuremberg trials to enable at least some adjustment to Fuller's views. His support for reconciliation with Germany, not to mention his underwriting of the campaign for West German rearmament, did make him open to accusations of turning a blind eye to the crimes of the Third Reich; this was exacerbated by the fact that his writings, and especially his *History of the Second World War, 1939-1945*, proved popular with former *Wehrmacht* generals.¹⁴⁵

142. His argument that strategic bombing wasted resources does seem now to be more questionable from a purely military point of view. The balance of opinion is that it did shorten the war, representing one of the major factors contributing to Germany's defeat. For a balanced discussion, Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, pp. 101-33.

143. Fuller, *Conduct of War*, p. 264.

144. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 15/12/14, George M. Lindsay to Archibald Wavell, 13 November 1936.

145. See, for example, the references in: Hasso von Manteuffel, "German Morale, 1939-1945," *An Consantoir*, November 1949, pp. 522-26, here 526; Siegfried Westphal, *Heer in Fesseln* (Bonn: Athenäum, 2nd ed., 1952), p. 46; Werner Picht, et al., *Bilanz des*

It would be unreasonable, though, to judge Fuller's assessment of Churchill by today's standards of scholarship. The main means of measurement must be against his postwar contemporaries who commented on Churchill: in other words, how out of step with mainstream opinion was Fuller's view of Churchill as a grand strategist? As has been shown, it ran contrary to the broad direction of public and historical opinion during and after the war, even if senior military officers may have been quietly in agreement with some of his analysis. Significantly, just at the moment when Churchillian rhetoric came into its own in 1940, Fuller reacted instinctively against it:¹⁴⁶ he found it to be a substitute for sound strategy; and, he disliked its appeal to the mentality of the crowd. While other military critics came later, and some of his views filtered unattributed into the public domain through the pen of Basil Liddell Hart, no writer in Britain set out in such a determined fashion both during and after the hostilities to assault the Prime Minister's wartime military record.

In the final analysis, Fuller's criticism of Churchill's conduct of the Second World War was driven to an extent by moral outrage at strategic bombing.¹⁴⁷ But Fuller was never someone who relied entirely on emotions. His arguments were also based on clear strategic logic. Shortly after the end of the war, reflecting on the implications of atomic energy, he talked of the need for a return to Clausewitzian warfare; yet, it was "no good burking the fact that the world to-day is faced by Churchillian warfare – by bleedings, blastings and burnings, by devastation, obliteration and annihilation, however insane and unprofitable these may be."¹⁴⁸ This was, in many ways, the ultimate form of condemnation – "Churchillian warfare" held up as the negation of "Clausewitzian warfare." But this juxtaposition demonstrates the central cornerstone of Fuller's thesis on Churchill as a grand strategist. Whatever the underestimation by him of the many difficulties faced by Britain's wartime leader, it should be acknowledged that the first serious revisionist of the "Churchill myth" was J.F.C. Fuller.

Zweiten Weltkrieges (Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1953), pp. 162, 173, 459-60, 465; and, Valentin Feurstein, *Irrwege der Pflicht 1938-1945* (Munich/Wels: Welsermühl, 1963), pp. 43, 130-31, 138-39, 152, 214, 292.

146. Churchill's rhetoric was communicated to the general public largely via the press, or by radio announcers. He disliked speaking on the radio; indeed, he came across badly over the air waves. Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front, 1900-1950* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), pp. 334-35. For a sense of how views on Churchill's rhetoric have changed since 1945: Lord Justice Birkett, "Churchill the Orator," in Eade, ed., *Churchill – By His Contemporaries*, pp. 223-33; and, David Cannadine, "Language: Churchill as the Voice of Destiny," in idem, *In Churchill's Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), pp. 85-113.

147. In some cases, the language and moral arguments he used seem to anticipate the writings of more recent moral and philosophical critics of strategic bombing, such as Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (Munich: Propyläen, 2002), and A.C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Was the Allied Bombing of Civilians in WWII a Crime or a Necessity?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

148. Fuller, *Armament and History*, pp. 200-01.

Fuller's rejection of the claims that Winston Churchill was omniscient in matters of grand strategy during the Second World War was his own personal battle for intellectual survival in the face of the stifling effects of propaganda during the conflict. In doing so, he provided an alternative version to official statements during the war and eulogies of Churchill after it; this in turn laid the foundations for subsequent reconsiderations of the wartime Prime Minister's approach to strategy. And, for this reason, his critique still deserves – indeed demands – the attention of historians of the Second World War.

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Alaric Searle is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Salford. He is the editor of the recent essay collection, *Genesis, Employment, Aftermath: First World War Tanks and the New Warfare, 1900-1945* (Solihull: Helion, 2015), and is the author of *Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society, and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), as well as numerous scholarly articles on British and German military, political, and intelligence history.