

**ROOSEVELT'S**

**LOST**



**ALLIANCES**

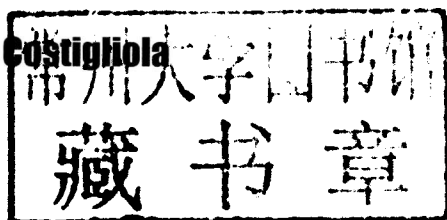
**HOW PERSONAL POLITICS HELPED START THE COLD WAR**

**FRANK COSTIGLIOLA**

# ROOSEVELT'S LOST ALLIANCES

**How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War**

Frank Costigliola



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*Cover photo:* Roosevelt recounted that Stalin, on meeting Sarah Churchill at the Tehran Conference, “leaped to his feet at once,” and greeted her “in the most elegant court mannerly style.” FDR commented, “You see, Stalin has something else in him besides this revolutionist, Bolshevik thing.” From right are Churchill, Anthony Eden, Archibald Clark Kerr, General “Hap” Arnold, FDR, Averell Harriman, Sarah Churchill, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Stalin. Photo by Evening Standard / Stringer. Courtesy of Hulton Archives / Getty Images.

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## **ROOSEVELT'S LOST ALLIANCES**

**For Diann**

## **Key Players**

**DEAN ACHESON.** State department official before 1949; secretary of state, 1949–53.

**LORD ALANBROOKE.** British military head.

**LORD BEAVERBROOK (MAX AITKEN).** British war production chief.

**LAVRENTY BERIA.** Head of Soviet secret police.

**SERGO BERIA.** Oversaw spying on Roosevelt and Churchill at Tehran and Yalta summits.

**ANNA ROOSEVELT BOETTIGER.** Daughter of Franklin and Eleanor; aide to FDR in 1944–45.

**CHARLES E. "CHIP" BOHLEN.** Diplomat in Moscow embassy in 1930s; FDR's interpreter at Tehran and Yalta.

**DR. HOWARD G. BRUENN.** FDR's cardiologist.

**WILLIAM C. BULLITT.** Ambassador to Moscow, 1933–36, and wartime critic of FDR's policy toward Stalin.

**JAMES F. BYRNES.** Truman's secretary of state, 1946–47.

**ALEXANDER CADOGAN.** British Foreign Office official.

**CLEMENTINE CHURCHILL.** Wife of Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill.

**LADY RANDOLPH CHURCHILL (JENNIE JEROME).** American-born mother of Winston S. Churchill.

**PAMELA CHURCHILL.** Daughter-in-law of Winston and Clementine; lover of Averell Harriman.

**ARCHIBALD CLARK KERR.** British ambassador in Moscow, 1943–46.

**JOHN COLVILLE.** Aide to Prime Minister Churchill.

**THOMAS G. CORCORAN.** Drafter of New Deal legislation; member of FDR's inner circle.

**JOSEPH E. DAVIES.** Ambassador to Moscow after Bullitt and a defender of Soviet point of view.

**ELBRIDGE DUSBROW.** Diplomat in Moscow embassy in 1930s.

**JOSEPH DZHUGASHVILI.** Stalin's original name.

**ANTHONY EDEN.** British foreign secretary under Churchill.

**JAMES V. FORRESTAL.** Secretary of the Navy and skeptic about cooperation with the Soviets.

**FELIX FRANKFURTER.** Supreme Court justice and informal adviser to FDR.

**ANDREI GROMYKO.** Soviet ambassador to Washington.

**LORD HALIFAX.** British ambassador to Washington.

**KATHLEEN HARRIMAN.** Daughter of Averell; friend of Pamela Churchill; hostess in Moscow embassy.

**W. AVERELL HARRIMAN.** FDR's Lend Lease representative in London, 1941–43; ambassador to Moscow, 1943–46.

**OLIVER HARVEY.** Assistant to Eden.

**HARRY L. HOPKINS.** FDR's adviser and friend; lived in the White House from 1940 to 1943.

**LOUIS M. HOWE.** Longtime adviser to FDR; lived in the White House.

- CORDELL HULL. Secretary of state and rival of Sumner Welles.
- HAROLD L. ICKES. Secretary of the interior.
- LORD HASTINGS ISMAY. Military adviser to Churchill.
- IAN JACOB. Military aide to Churchill.
- GEORGE F. KENNAN. Diplomat in Moscow, 1933–37 and 1944–46; author of the “long telegram.”
- JOSEPH P. KENNEDY. Ambassador to London and skeptic of Britain’s resistance to the Germans.
- ADMIRAL WILLIAM D. LEAHY. FDR’s military chief of staff.
- MARGUERITE “MISSY” LEHAND. FDR’s live-in friend and aide.
- WALTER LIPPMANN. Respected newspaper columnist.
- MAXIM LITVINOV. Soviet foreign minister in 1930s; ambassador to Washington, 1941–43.
- ISADOR LUBIN. New Deals statistician chosen by FDR for 1945 Reparations Commission in Moscow.
- CLARE BOOTHE LUCE. Republican Congresswoman; wife of Time-Life publisher Henry Luce.
- IVAN MAISKY. Soviet ambassador to London until 1943.
- GENERAL GEORGE C. MARSHALL. Army chief of staff and adviser to FDR.
- JOHN J. MCCLOY. Assistant to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.
- ROBERT K. MEIKLEJOHN. Assistant to Harriman.
- LUCY MERCER (RUTHERFURD). Longtime intimate of FDR.
- VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV. Soviet foreign minister and adviser to Stalin.
- LORD MORAN (CHARLES WILSON). Prime Minister Churchill’s doctor and companion.
- EDWARD R. MURROW. CBS radio broadcaster from London during the Blitz.
- EDWIN W. PAULEY. Democratic Party operative and friend of Truman who replaced Lubin on the Reparations Commission.
- FRANCES PERKINS. Secretary of labor and longtime friend of FDR.
- FRANK K. ROBERTS. British diplomat in Moscow and friend of Kennan.
- SARA DELANO ROOSEVELT. FDR’s mother.
- SAMUEL I. ROSENMAN. FDR’s speechwriter.
- RICHARD SCANDRETT. Legal expert on Reparations Commission in Moscow.
- DOROTHY SCHIFF. Publisher of *New York Post*; friend of FDR.
- ROBERT E. SHERWOOD. Playwright; author; speechwriter for FDR.
- MARY SOAMES. Daughter of Winston and Clementine Churchill.
- LAURENCE STEINHARDT. Ambassador to Moscow, 1939–41.
- EDWARD R. STETTINIUS, JR. Secretary of state, 1944–45.
- MARGARET “DAISY” SUCKLEY. FDR’s friend and Hudson Valley neighbor.
- CHARLES W. THAYER. Assistant to Bullitt in Moscow embassy and friend of Kennan.
- ANDREY VYSHINSKY. Prosecutor in Soviet purge trials of 1930s; wartime deputy minister of foreign affairs.
- HENRY A. WALLACE. Vice president, 1941–45; secretary of commerce, 1945–46.
- CHRISTOPHER WARNER. Soviet expert in British foreign office.
- SUMNER WELLES. FDR’s confidant in the state department; forced out in 1943.
- WENDELL WILLKIE. Republican candidate for president in 1940; went on a round-the-world trip in 1942.
- GEOFFREY WILSON. Soviet expert in British foreign office.
- JOHN G. WINANT. Ambassador to London, 1941–46.
- IVAN D. YEATON. Anti-Soviet U.S. military attaché in Moscow.

## **Contents**

*List of Key Players* ix

*Introduction* 1

- CHAPTER 1** A Portrait of the Allies as Young Men: Franklin, Winston, and Koba 21
- CHAPTER 2** From Missy to Molotov: The Women and Men Who Sustained the Big Three 58
- CHAPTER 3** The Personal Touch: Forming the Alliance, January–August 1941 97
- CHAPTER 4** Transcending Differences: Eden Goes to Moscow and Churchill to Washington, December 1941 141
- CHAPTER 5** Creating the “Family Circle”: The Tortuous Path to Tehran, 1942–43 163
- CHAPTER 6** “I’ve Worked It Out”: Roosevelt’s Plan to Win the Peace and Defy Death, 1944–45 205
- CHAPTER 7** The Diplomacy of Trauma: Kennan and His Colleagues in Moscow, 1933–46 259
- CHAPTER 8** Guns and Kisses in the Kremlin: Ambassadors Harriman and Clark Kerr Encounter Stalin, 1943–46 291
- CHAPTER 9** “Roosevelt’s Death Has Changed Everything”: Truman’s First Days, April–June 1945 312
- CHAPTER 10** The Lost Alliance: Widespread Anxiety and Deepening Ideology, July 1945–March 1946 359

*Conclusion and Epilogue* 418

*Acknowledgments* 429

<i>Bibliographical Note</i>	433
<i>Notes</i>	437
<i>Index</i>	523

## **Introduction**

Of all the many books on Allied diplomacy in World War II, Robert E. Sherwood's magisterial *Roosevelt and Hopkins* remains unequaled.<sup>1</sup> Published in 1948, the 962-page tome draws on Sherwood's insider status as a Roosevelt speechwriter and on his discussions with the historical actors. Sherwood was forbidden, however, to use his most explosive interview, the one that assigned blame for the breakup of the Grand Alliance. The interviewee was Anthony Eden, Winston S. Churchill's foreign secretary. In wartime negotiations the top diplomat had loyally supported his chief even when the latter tangled with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Eden stood next in line for prime minister should the Conservatives win the next election. He understood that postwar Britain depended on Washington, where Harry S. Truman served as president. Nevertheless, by August 1946 this habitually restrained aristocrat was so disturbed by the deterioration in relations with Moscow since Roosevelt's death in April 1945 that he let loose. In lamenting the loss of Roosevelt, Eden criticized Churchill and Truman in ways that, if made public, could have crippled his future career. After venting, he insisted on keeping the interview secret. And so it long remained.

To Sherwood, Eden "stated flatly that the deplorable turning point in the whole relationship of the Western Allies with the Soviet Union was caused directly by the death of Roosevelt." The former foreign secretary seemed moved himself as he detailed the emotional valence of FDR's relationship with the Russians. "He spoke at length and with great conviction of the extraordinary ability of Roosevelt to handle the Russian situation and of the overwhelming respect which the Russians had for the President." Decades of practicing realpolitik had attuned Eden to intangibles, such as personality and respect. The

Russians' "respect" for Roosevelt "was for the man himself rather than for the high and powerful position that he held." Eden understood that manner and nuance could tip the balance between success and failure. He was blunt about how Roosevelt differed from others who had dealt with the Russians. "Eden spoke of Roosevelt's infinite subtlety and contrasted him in this respect with Churchill and Truman." Particularly at a critical juncture in history, such as 1945, emotional and personal dynamics could tilt the weightiest matters of international politics. As Eden put it, "had Roosevelt lived and retained his health he would never have permitted the present situation to develop." A professional in the precise measurement of words, he offered a stunning final judgment: Roosevelt's "death, therefore, was a calamity of immeasurable proportions."<sup>2</sup> *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances* reaches a similar conclusion.

Roosevelt's death weakened, perhaps fatally, the prospects for avoiding or at least mitigating the Cold War. FDR was critical to the founding of the Grand Alliance and to keeping it together. He intended the coalition to continue into the postwar era, as did Joseph Stalin. Despite his Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Soviet dictator also identified with Czar Alexander I, who had remained a partner in the Holy Alliance after the victory over Napoleon. Stalin wanted strong confederates to help contain postwar Germany and Japan.<sup>3</sup> Churchill, nervous about the "Great Russian Bear" and the "Great American Buffalo" squeezing the "poor little English donkey," remained more ambivalent about continued Big Three partnership.<sup>4</sup> Just as the war-time alliance depended on Roosevelt, so, too, did Roosevelt rely on a personal alliance of close aides and friends in the White House. Tragically, however, FDR persisted in behaviors that drained this intimate circle. In contrast to Truman and the embittered Soviet experts who would become the new president's principal advisers, the supremely self-confident Roosevelt lavished on Stalin displays of respect that salved the dictator's personal and cultural insecurities, rendering him more amenable to compromise on certain issues.

As the fulcrum of the Grand Alliance, Roosevelt merits primary, but not exclusive, attention.<sup>5</sup> For Churchill and Stalin, as well as for Roosevelt, background, personality, and culture conditioned their emo-

tional beliefs and their interactions with each other. This book examines wartime diplomacy in the context of each leader's family and cultural heritage, formative experiences, and emotional dispositions and sensibilities. Spurred by personal feelings as well as by official responsibilities, Roosevelt and Churchill, and, perhaps, Stalin, too, approached their initial summit meetings as grand adventure. As the terrible strain of the war mounted, these flesh-and-blood titans interacted in ways increasingly conditioned by sickness and exhaustion.

Despite their other differences, the Big Three all sought to appear resolute and manly. Early in the war, each tried to persuade the other two, and the Axis enemies mocking them as weak and decadent, that he possessed the toughness to persevere until victory. Yet all of them, too, in their respective ways, had to live with a gender identity more complex than the conventional norms of masculinity. This complexity also enabled each man to draw from a wider spectrum of behaviors. With a hint of femininity, Roosevelt and Stalin charmed and seduced. Forever boyish, Churchill enthused and effervesced. As the war was drawing to a close, benign impressions of Stalin as seducer were overpowered by frightening reports of the Red Army's rape and pillage.

The functioning of the wartime alliance and the future of the post-war world pivoted on diplomacy inextricably personal and political. It remains impossible, however, to isolate what the precise impact of the "personal" would be on a hypothesized, wholly impersonal "political" interaction—not that such could ever occur among human beings.

The most persuasive evidence for the real-life importance of personal diplomacy was the extraordinary, indeed heroic, efforts made by Roosevelt and Churchill. FDR, aware of his heart disease, risked his life in journeying to far-off Yalta. Defying exhaustion and bouts of pneumonia, Churchill traveled repeatedly to Washington and to Moscow. After negotiating with the Kremlin dictator in October 1944, Churchill found it "extraordinary how many questions yield to discussion and personal talk."<sup>6</sup> Even Stalin, who had not gone abroad since the 1917 Revolution, left the Soviet Union for the Tehran and Potsdam conferences. A telling marker of the shift in Washington's stance after Roosevelt's demise was Truman's telling his staff in late 1945 that he did not intend any further Big Three summit meetings.

The Cold War was not inevitable. Nor did that conflict stem solely from political disputes and the ideological clash between capitalism and communism. Examining how the Grand Alliance operated and then fell apart is prerequisite for understanding how the Cold War formed. The alliance cohered and then collapsed for reasons more contingent, emotional, and cultural than historians have heretofore recognized. If Roosevelt had lived a while longer—indeed, he was trying to manage his health in order to survive—he might have succeeded in bringing about the transition to a postwar world managed by the Big Three. His death and Churchill's electoral defeat three months later disrupted personal and political connections in which all three leaders had invested enormous effort and cautious hope. Neither the men who succeeded these giants, nor the American "Soviet experts" who asserted a more decisive role than they had hitherto been allowed to play, shared Roosevelt's, or even Churchill's, interest in Big Three accord.

The dynamics of the Cold War—the mutually reinforcing pursuit of ambition and fear of threat on the part of the two superpowers—originated in a zero-sum model quite different from that imagined by the Big Three leaders during the war. They had surmised that after the war, their rivalry and differences, though sharp at times, could be corralled by their mutual interest in a stable and peaceful world that would ensure their collective predominance. Their envisioned order would have restricted the liberty of smaller nations in the regional domain of each of the Big Three sheriffs. Roosevelt largely accepted such restrictions in the expectation that they could ease with time. He was amenable to areas of influence as long as they did not become exclusive and closed. The Cold War that actually developed would highlight Soviet injustice in Eastern Europe without doing much to ease the pain. Indeed, perceptive observers, such as the diplomat George F. Kennan, would decades later come to see the Cold War as promoting the repression rather than the liberation of the Soviet Union's empire.

While mobilizing public anger against the Axis, Roosevelt tried to tamp down uproar over issues, such as Poland, that could split the Grand Alliance. At times FDR himself became furious with Stalin. Yet

he tried to control such feelings. Churchill and Truman, in contrast, did not or could not exercise such restraint. He also tried harder than Churchill or Truman to build bridges—some of them admittedly shaky—across the cultural divide separating the Americans and British from the Soviets. Though not inclined toward detailed study or abstract concepts, the squire of Hyde Park wielded a razor-sharp emotional intelligence. Masterful in reading personality and in negotiating subtle transactions of pride and respect, he could charm almost anyone. He deployed these skills with surprising success in establishing a bond with Stalin.

The Kremlin chieftain also tried to limit hyperemotional reactions in the alliance and in his own entourage. In January 1945, he instructed fellow Communists: “In relation to bourgeois politicians you have to be careful. They are . . . very touchy and vindictive. You have to keep a handle on your emotions; if emotions lead—you lose.”<sup>7</sup> Despite such advice, Stalin himself remained susceptible to anger, revenge, pride, and flattery.

Cultural differences excited emotional reactions and complicated political issues. Insecure pride, craving for respect, anxiety about change, and fear of appearing fearful skewed political perceptions, making political compromises more difficult. Racialized cultural stereotypes of “semi-savage” Soviets and of “conniving” cosmopolitans eager to make “fools” out of Russians hampered the formation of the alliance in 1941 and helped destroy it after the war. John “Jock” Balfour, a British diplomat familiar with both Moscow and Washington, advised a group of influential Americans: “Russia is so different from us historically, politically, and culturally that in many respects she seems almost like another planet.”<sup>8</sup> Roosevelt employed personal ties to make such differences appear less alien.

U.S. and British relations with the Soviets played out on two stages with different scenery, performers, and rules—resulting in divergent moods between the two groups of players. At Churchill’s 1941–44 conferences with Roosevelt, at the three-way summits of Tehran in 1943 and Yalta in 1945, at Churchill’s two conferences with Stalin in Moscow in 1942 and 1944, and at the 1945 Potsdam meeting that included Truman, top leaders emerged from the intense talks convinced

they had advanced their personal ties and political agendas. There was something seductive about wheeling and dealing with other men of power. "When Truman returned from Potsdam, he was in a state of advanced euphoria," a top aide later recalled.<sup>9</sup> Feelings of warmth and needs for approval altered perspectives. "I'd like that man to like me," Churchill said after first meeting Stalin.<sup>10</sup> Leaders came away readier to trust each other. Such short-term feelings probably resulted in part from physiological change.<sup>11</sup> Though the pleasant glow from each summit would fade, political progress had usually been gained. A key aspect of Roosevelt's postwar vision was institutionalizing such summits as regular events, in which the three or four "world sheriffs" would gather at some secluded location like the Azores and hash out solutions without the glare of media attention.<sup>12</sup> A master at personal charm, Roosevelt probably expected that such meetings would gradually acculturate participants to the American model.

Far different, however, were the stale and limited roles that the U.S. and British diplomats, military liaison officers, and journalists stationed in Moscow found themselves playing each day. They deeply resented their intense personal isolation. The Kremlin's policy of isolating foreigners from "normal" contacts with Soviet citizens and officials rendered many representatives frustrated, furious, and even disoriented. Feeling especially aggrieved were Kennan and Charles E. "Chip" Bohlen, ambassadors William C. Bullitt and W. Averell Harri-man, and the Pentagon liaison to the Red Army, General John R. Deane. Each had intended to strike up personal relations with Russians, immerse himself in Russian culture, and become the interlocutor between Washington and Moscow. The "no-contact" regime thwarted those good intentions. These diplomats and military liaison officials served as the optical nerves of the U.S. and British governments. What they reported from Moscow and what they said on returning home was conditioned by their disappointment, anger, and resentment. Most were skeptical about compromise with a country whose repressive system they had personally experienced.

Colleagues who had not served in Russia tended to defer to the inconsistent opinion of those with firsthand experience. Moscow-based diplomats expected the contact and freedom that were embedded in

their own culture. They had little empathy for the cultural insecurity, military exigencies, and political imperatives of Soviet leaders. Their sense of exceptionalism was always operative, and especially influential once Roosevelt was gone.

Pushing for contact with Soviet citizens constituted the personal element in America's and (to a lesser extent Britain's) traditional foreign policy of the open door, that is, seeking unhampered trade and investment as well as travel and information around the globe. While pursuing this goal, U.S. officials would end up accepting half-measures in much of the world. In Soviet domains, however, the open door policy hooked into not just politics and economics but also gut-level convictions about access, freedom, and information. As Harriman reminded Americans in Moscow, "Anything unknown to us is sinister."<sup>13</sup>

## Historiography

For years after 1945, the former diplomats in Moscow helped to enforce not merely a Cold War policy but also a one-sided interpretation of the very history of the conflict. This view blamed the Cold War solely on Soviet aggression and intransigence. In 1949, Edward R. Stettinius Jr., FDR's secretary of state at Yalta, completed a memoir that assigned some of the fault to U.S. policy after Roosevelt's death. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, an informal adviser to FDR, applauded Stettinius for having "vindicated the great man who is no longer here to speak for himself."<sup>14</sup> Chip Bohlen, in contrast, sharply disagreed. He warned the retired secretary of state that "all of those" currently (in 1949) managing relations with Moscow concurred that the Cold War had originated wholly "in the character and nature of the Soviet state" and in its ideology. U.S. policy under Truman bore no significant responsibility for tensions, he insisted. Bohlen responded "so frankly" and so vehemently because Stettinius was challenging what had become gospel truth: the Cold War was inevitable and Moscow's fault. Bohlen restated the creed: "Yalta proved the impossibility of expecting agreements with the Soviet Union to provide solutions to the postwar world." He disputed Stettinius's memory that at Yalta "a

really solid basis was arrived at which was somehow or other frittered away by mutual suspicion on both sides, etc.”<sup>15</sup> By the 1950s, few in the West questioned the prevailing narrative: a largely innocent, well-intentioned United States had reluctantly, indeed bravely, taken up the burden of defending the “Free World” against an aggressive, ideologically driven Soviet Union led by a grasping dictator.<sup>16</sup>

Despite their denunciation of the character and ideology of the Soviet Union, these original Cold Warriors did not assert what some historians would later claim: the supposed madness of Stalin. Bohlen, Kennan, Harriman, and others who had repeatedly seen the dictator up close condemned him as ruthless, brutal, cruel, and calculating—but not as insane.

The historiographical fight over the origins of the Cold War flamed up in the 1960s. Many of the documents published in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes for the war and immediate postwar years undermined the Manichaeism of the orthodox interpretation. William A. Williams’s *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), Walter LaFeber’s *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–66* (1967), Gabriel Kolko’s *The Politics of War* (1968), and Lloyd C. Gardner’s *Architects of Illusion* (1970), among other works, stressed that U.S. leaders were pursuing what they perceived as America’s national interest in opening markets and in laying the groundwork for resurgent capitalism around the world, including in Eastern Europe. In another strand of “revisionism,” Gar Alperovitz’s *Atomic Diplomacy* argued that the Truman administration had dropped the two atomic bombs on Japan, even though Tokyo seemed ready to surrender, in order to intimidate Moscow.<sup>17</sup> The revisionists argued, convincingly, that U.S. policy was far more aggressive than defensive. Such challenges to the orthodox interpretation rankled most policymakers from the 1940s. Harriman labeled Alperovitz’s study “an awful book. Horrible book.”<sup>18</sup>

In May 1967, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. mounted a counteroffensive against the revisionists. A prize-winning historian, adviser to the Kennedys, and champion of the Cold War consensus then fracturing in the Vietnam War, Schlesinger aimed to quash the heresy with an authoritative article in the respected journal *Foreign Affairs*. To as-