

Frank Costigliola. *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War*.

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Every so often appears a new publication that demonstrates the complexities of the historian's craft and reminds professionals that their scholarly pursuits—no matter how evenhanded, rational, or seemingly definitive—must ultimately land somewhere between art and science. So is the case with Frank Costigliola's engaging and thought-provoking new study of "personal politics." Not surprisingly a book that prods historians to consider untraditional methods will also divide its audience. Adherents to large structural interpretations for equally substantial topics, like the dissolution of the Grand Alliance and the onset of the decades-long Cold War, will squirm through this one. Those who think small things can ripple into enormous consequences will feel more at home.

Personalities matter, especially if they wield the political power of a Roosevelt, Churchill, or Stalin. Costigliola, a history professor at the University of Connecticut, denies the inevitability of the Cold War and argues that the alliance might have been sustained after defeat of the Axis. He writes, "The alliance cohered and then collapsed for reasons more contingent, emotional, and cultural than historians have heretofore recognized" (4). The Big Three brought their own emotional baggage, maturing senses of cultural awareness, and networks of supportive cohorts to

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Tehran, Yalta, and various in-betweens, which helped develop mutual trust and respect and, thus, a stronger foundation for postwar cooperation. Of particular importance were the various means of male bonding: hard drinking into the late hours, gorging on a series of glutinous feasts, or using a homoerotic language of flirtation and seduction. Refreshingly, the author brings diplomacy back into the history of foreign relations.

Costigliola never resists an opportunity to sexualize a situation or quote innuendo. In one bizarre instance, a fully nude Churchill received FDR into his guestroom at the White House to discuss wartime intelligence and atomic research, which “likely fostered a sense of intimacy and trust” (155). The prime minister’s coquettish daughter-in-law, Pamela, mixed sex with politics, pushing British and American diplomats into a common environment of salacious gossip. The reader might wonder from time to time about the inclusion of such tantalizing details. Does it really matter that the young Winston felt an oedipal strain brought on by his mum’s sexuality? Is it important that FDR had enough androgyny to audition for the female lead in a school play? Should the Cold War historian really consider Stalin’s pockmarked face or manicured nails? However entertaining to read, some of these juicy tidbits carry only the most tenuous connection to wartime diplomacy.

There are numerous supporting actors like mistresses, family members, and right-hand men Harry Hopkins, Anthony Eden, and Vyacheslav Molotov, but the most important is Roosevelt, the “linchpin of the Grand Alliance” (57). His easy disposition almost always transcended his flaws. Costigliola buys into the president’s own belief that he could charm Stalin into compromise. As the Allies squeezed Nazi Germany from all sides, FDR distanced himself from members of his inner circle and foreign policy team who grew increasingly hostile toward the Soviet Union. To their dismay, he was tuning from the Atlantic Charter’s Wilsonian principles of

an open world toward recognition of separate spheres that “accorded with actuality” and could either “operate on the basis of collaboration or cold war” (382).

Roosevelt’s death in April 1945 creates the book’s major shift and point of contingency. (Even the subarachnoid hemorrhage that felled him could have happened at any point in his life and did not result from preceding months of sickliness.) With Truman taking office, the keystone of the alliance shifted from Roosevelt’s cooperativeness to a dramatically different emotional tenor. Truman was limited by his “tunnel vision and blind faith in American exceptionalism” (417). He overcompensated for his insecurities, confusing rash decision making for decisiveness and stubbornness for toughness. His lack of preparation for the presidency, for which Costigliola blames Roosevelt, meant that he relied more on subordinates, raising the influence of hardliners like Averell Harriman.

The switch from Roosevelt to Truman behooves the reader to address a counterfactual question: *what if Roosevelt lived longer?* The author convincingly suggests that FDR would have handled atomic diplomacy—perhaps sharing atomic secrets and what Truman called American “know-how”—in a way that would have soothed emerging Cold War tensions. While the world will never know for sure what might have been, imagining the postwar period with Roosevelt in it leads Costigliola to other bold but sensible observations. As he reminds the reader, “In the end, getting tough did not roll back the Iron Curtain . . . Ironically, it was the diplomacy of détente that eventually undermined the Soviet system” (352). Indeed, Roosevelt embodied such an approach better than anyone.