In 1942, government-controlled radio stations and newspapers in the Soviet Union announced that a "complete understanding" had been reached by Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt with regard to the opening of a second front in Europe that would draw away German divisions facing the Red Army in the East.

In fact, Susan Butler, a writer and editor, reminds us, Churchill had deep reservations about the second front strategy. But given the support of Roosevelt and Stalin, the best he could do was dissemble, divert and delay.

According to Butler, who has edited the correspondence between FDR and Stalin, Roosevelt harbored no illusions about Stalin's brutality. Convinced that Stalin had no military designs on Western Europe, however, FDR sought to bring him "inside the tent." The result, she argues, was a productive partnership and an uneasy friendship between two men who held similar views about the postwar world.

In "Roosevelt and Stalin: Portrait of a Partnership," Butler provides a detailed examination of the evolving relationship between these two powerful men. She portrays Roosevelt as a political pragmatist with an extraordinary capacity to charm and persuade. Butler demonstrates that because FDR assumed from the outset that Stalin's drive to dominate Eastern Europe was based less on his communist ideology than on his nationalistic determination to protect Russia's borders, and that Roosevelt could do nothing about it anyway, he looked to the future and gambled on Stalin's need for a friendly America, World Bank and International Monetary Fund to help the Soviet Union recover from the devastations of World War.

That said, "Roosevelt and Stalin" often oversimplifies complex motives, behaviors, and outcomes. At times, Butler reduces Churchill to a racist and a colonialist, interested only in protecting the British empire. She exaggerates the concessions Stalin made to Roosevelt at the conferences at Tehran and Yalta on religious freedom and Poland: they were, in reality, more rhetorical than substantive. Stalin, moreover, did not agree with Roosevelt about the role of
the United Nations in the postwar world. Nor should the machinations of the Soviet Union about the postwar world be attributed to Vaycheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister, rather than Stalin.

Even more important, perhaps, it is not at all certain that FDR would have shared control and knowledge of atomic energy with the Soviet Union. Or that Roosevelt could have prevented the Cold War had he lived.

United by an urgent need to defeat the Nazis, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin did forge a productive partnership. Based far more on common interests than on trust, that partnership was bound to change when World War II ended and a "fearful Stalin, the most paranoid of world leaders" faced a suspicious and stridently anti-communist America.

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