



RIDDLE, MYSTERY, AND ENIGMA

Two Hundred Years
of British-Russian Relations

DAVID OWEN

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History

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- Former Foreign Secretary David Owen has written widely on diplomatic history and geopolitics. Henry Kissinger described his book on the diplomatic prelude to the First World War, *The Hidden Perspective*, as ‘**essential reading for contemporary statesmen**’.
- The book comes at a time when relations between Putin’s Russia and Britain are at a historic low, after the Salisbury poisoning and as Russia seeks to reassert its power on the world stage.
- Exploring military, geopolitical, and diplomatic history, *Riddle, Mystery, and Enigma* is **the first full account of the historical relationship between Britain and Russia**.

Britain’s relationship with the giant on the edge of the continent, Russia, are surprisingly under explored. In a panorama spanning two hundred years, former foreign secretary David Owen reveals how relations between the two countries have ebbed and flowed – and why they have seemingly reached a new low in recent years.

When the two countries formed a cautiously pragmatic alliance with the French and fought alongside one another at Navarino in 1827 – a battle that ultimately swung the balance of the Greek War of Independence – it was overwhelmingly the work of one man: the prime minister, George Canning. His death shortly before the battle brought about a volte-face that would see the countries fight on opposing sides in the Crimea and marked a freeze in relations as the countries jostled for power during the decades of the Great Game.

It was not until the revolution of 1917 that another statesman, this time Winston Churchill, emerged to have a defining impact on Britain–Russia relations as an avowed opponent of Bolshevism. Yet Churchill never stopped advocating engagement with Russia, be it diplomatic or military. In the Second World War, he recognised earlier than most the necessity of allying with the Soviets against the menace of Nazi Germany – and then, in the post-war context, the threat to freedom posed by the Soviets themselves.

Bringing us well into the twenty-first century, Owen chronicles how both countries have responded to years of waning international influence and geopolitical decline, dwarfed by the emergent superpowers of China and the United States. Drawing on both imperial and Soviet history he explains the unique nature of Putin’s autocracy and ends with Britain’s return to blue water diplomacy.

With Owen’s characteristic insight and expertise, *Riddle, Mystery, Enigma* depicts a relationship as often governed by principle as by suspicion, expediency, and outright necessity.

David Owen served as Foreign Secretary under James Callaghan from 1977 until 1979, and later co-founded and went on to lead the Social Democratic Party (SDP). He is the author of books including *The Hidden Perspective* (2014) and *Cabinet’s Finest Hour* (2016).