



***Khrushchev's Cold War:  
The Inside Story of an American Adversary***  
**Roundtable Review**

Reviewed Works:

**Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali.** *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary.* New York: W.W. Norton, February 2006 (hardcover, ISBN: 0-393-05809-3); October 2007 (paperback, ISBN: 978-0-393-33072-4).

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: Campbell Craig, Hope M. Harrison, Kenneth Osgood, Vladislav Zubok

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## ROUNDTABLE *Review*

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### **Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge**

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In *The Rivals: America and Russia since World War II* (1971), Adam Ulam offered an early assessment on the Cold War that was particularly interesting on Nikita Khrushchev and his interaction with Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. Under the pressure of domestic problems, most notably sluggish growth in the Soviet economy and failed agricultural programs, as well as difficulties within the Soviet Eastern bloc, especially with Hungary in 1956, Khrushchev, according to Ulam, developed an interest in a relaxation of Cold War tensions. The escalation of the nuclear arms race with the introduction of missile technology reinforced the Soviet leader's desire to curb the costs of Cold War competition. At the same time, however, Khrushchev came under increasing pressure from Mao Zedong in China to take a more aggressive stance against the United States and its allies particularly in non-Western areas where crumbling Western colonialism opened up a wide range of opportunities to promote nationalist movements, communist parties, and potential allies on the left.

Ulam suggested that Khrushchev failed to resolve these conflicting pressures. Internal problems with East Germany and the exodus of its most skilled residents through West Berlin prompted him to threaten Eisenhower and Kennedy with repeated ultimatums to get out of West Berlin. Opportunities to exploit Western crises at Suez in 1956, Iraq and Lebanon in 1958, the Congo, Cuba, and Laos in 1960, could not be resisted by the Kremlin since Khrushchev, even with his advocacy of peaceful coexistence, remained hopeful that communism would triumph in the long run. The rhetoric that Khrushchev used in these crises as well as the most serious confrontation in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 made it very difficult for Western leaders to perceive a Soviet desire for *détente* and a relaxation of the tension, military costs, and nuclear risks in an escalating Cold War. Nevertheless, Ulam concluded that Khrushchev's desire for an accommodation with the U.S., perhaps an early version of *détente*, was real even if hopelessly entangled in Khrushchev's conflicting impulses, aggressive personality, and willingness to take considerable risks with his bluffs, threats, and ultimatums.

Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali have reopened debate on Khrushchev's objectives, strategy, and tactics. Unlike Ulam, they have had significant access to ex-Soviet archives including some intelligence files, Foreign Ministry records, minutes of the Presidium, and additional archival materials. They rely upon other assessments for Khrushchev's background such as William Taubman's recent biography of the Soviet leader. Fursenko and Naftali keep their focus on Khrushchev after he assumed a dominant position in the Presidium in 1955 and until his removal from office in October 1964. The reviewers are very impressed with Fursenko and Naftali's study which presents a narrative account that is difficult to put down and impossible to just skim. Several also note that the authors provide a very successful international history as they move back and forth in each of the major crises from what Khrushchev was discussing in the Presidium to Washington and the calculations of Eisenhower and Kennedy as they attempted to figure out what the leader of the Kremlin is up to in his latest demarche. Other leaders from both

sides of the Cold War also enter the narrative at appropriate times. The reviewers do raise some important questions about the study from its sources to its general thesis on Khrushchev and the important issue of whether or not an opportunity for early détente was missed. The responses of Fursenko and Naftali also clarify a number of issues and lend additional insight into their perspectives on Khrushchev.

1.) The issue of privileged access to several of the Russian archives has raised some concerns that the reviewers address. Hope Harrison and Vladislav Zubok, who have the most familiarity with the Soviet sources, note that other scholars can not yet review these important Presidium records. Naftali indicates in his response that Malin's notes have been published in Russian and are available in English on the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs website, and that he will deposit his notes on Soviet foreign ministry files at a library. The reviewers also point out that the authors do not discuss either the nature or potential problems with these sources or the relationship of their interpretation of Khrushchev with the existing historiography. A limited conclusion under the chapter title "Legacy" raises questions on the relationship of their views to other interpretations.

2.) The factors shaping Khrushchev's Cold War orientation and policies toward the U.S. interweave throughout the book and the reviewers' assessments. Fursenko and Naftali introduce at various points all of the considerations shaping Khrushchev's policies from his personality to domestic considerations, from realpolitik calculations of power and interest to management of the Soviet empire and relationships with major allies like China and new potential allies in the third world. One shaping factor, ideology, does emerge in Khrushchev's conversations and Presidium discussions when he and his colleagues reflect on the Cold War competition, the forces shaping U.S. policies, and longer term Soviet objectives. Khrushchev is depicted as having a faith in communism and commitment to its long term success at home and abroad. The relationship of these beliefs to specific policies such as support for Fidel Castro in Cuba or peaceful coexistence with the U.S. remains less developed.

3.) The reviewers are very impressed with Fursenko's and Naftali's skill at developing multiple perspectives on the Cold War crises within their narrative approach. They do note both agreement and disagreement with the author's interpretations. For example, in the discussion of the crisis in Berlin culminating in the construction of the Berlin Wall, the authors emphasize Khrushchev's initiative and decision-making and give considerably less weight to the pressure and policies of East German leader Walter Ulbricht as a factor forcing Khrushchev to act on Berlin.

4.) The Cuban missile crisis retains its fascination even though the authors have discussed the crisis in depth in *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-64* (1997). Several reviewers note that Fursenko and Naftali have shifted somewhat in their assessment of Khrushchev's objectives for moving missiles into Cuba. The earlier emphasis on Moscow's desire to defend Castro against the U.S. and keep him aligned with

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Moscow as opposed to China tends to give way to an opportunistic, gambling plan to undercut the U.S. advantage in intercontinental ballistic missiles and intermediate-range Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey. (pp. 430-431) As always Khrushchev discussed the Berlin issue and linked it to the missiles in the context of gaining leverage with Washington to compel a favorable settlement. (pp. 442-443) Khrushchev stands forth as the main catalyst for the crisis, leading the Presidium into the crisis without much debate, and rationalizing his retreat and removal of the missiles as a success.

5.) How well Khrushchev managed the various Cold War crises is a subject of some disagreement among the reviewers. Were the pressures on Khrushchev sufficient in situations such as East Germany and Berlin, Cuba, and the Suez Crisis, to warrant the risks that he took and the results that he achieved? Did Khrushchev perceive how far he could push the U.S. and its allies and recognize when to back off and accept a compromise? Or was Khrushchev too impetuous, erratic, and prone to brinkmanship time and time again to merit much credit as a Cold War crisis manager?

6.) One of the more tantalizing subjects raised by the authors focuses on their thesis that after the failure of the first Berlin Crisis in 1958, Khrushchev shifted more than 180 degrees to a pursuit of détente with the U.S. In chapter ten on "Grand Design," Fursenko and Naftali depict Khrushchev as significantly impressed with Eisenhower and the Camp David summit. In the context of trying to stimulate economic development to catch up with the West and achieve minimal nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis the U.S., Fursenko and Naftali present Khrushchev as preparing in 1960 for a general disarmament agreement that would reduce the military burdens on the Soviet Union and at the same time disarm U.S. missiles and military alliances and resolve the Berlin issue. In a fascinating discussion on the U-2 and Paris Summit Conference, "The Crash Heard Around the World," the authors suggest that considerations of credibility and prestige drove both Eisenhower and Khrushchev to prevent the U-2 incident from disrupting their mutual desire for a relaxation of the Cold War, if not the grand accommodation envisioned by Khrushchev. The narrative is so engaging in these chapters that it is easy to get excited about what might have happened if Eisenhower had stayed with his initial instinct to curb U-2 flights.

7.) Yet the Cold War by 1960 had clearly moved beyond a Eurocentric conflict that Washington and Moscow could manage. By the time of the Paris summit conference the Third World aggressively asserted itself onto the Soviet-U.S. agenda with bubbling crises in Laos, the Congo, Cuba, and South Vietnam. Fursenko and Naftali depict Khrushchev as having learned from his dealings with Iraq and Nasser in Egypt that he could assist efforts to weaken the West's presence in these areas, but prospects for an early emergence of communism remained remote as many communist party members in both Iraq and Egypt ended up either dead or in prison. With the exception of his enthusiasm for Castro, Khrushchev seemed to provide aid to nationalists such as Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and the Pathet Lao in Laos primarily from a realpolitik perspective of putting pressure on the U.S., maintaining the Soviet relationship with North Vietnam, and competing with China. In chapter 17 "Meniscus", the authors suggest that in the fall and winter of 1961-

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1962 Khrushchev stepped up a variety of pressures on the U.S. from a Pathet Lao offensive to take Nam Tha to support for a Cuban proposal to train Latin American insurgents for revolutionary activity with groups like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. (428) Financial support for the latter proposal remained very limited under Khrushchev, and he continued to favor a gradual, political victory for Pathet Lao that would not precipitate a U.S. military intervention.

8.) A concluding issue is whether or not the U.S. and the Soviet Union missed a realistic opportunity for an accommodation, détente, or an end to the Cold War during Khrushchev's regime. Naftali and Fursenko suggest the real possibility of at least a relaxation of tension and reduction of the arms race up to the collapse of the Paris summit conference in 1960. In their conclusion they affirm the consistency of Khrushchev's objectives: "Khrushchev sought to avoid war with the United States while seeking American respect, to shore up existing socialist states while cultivating new allies abroad, and to provide a better standard of living to his own people while building a sufficient strategic force .... Khrushchev imagined a grand settlement with the United States that would demilitarize the Cold War, allowing him to redirect resources to the Soviet civilian economy and restrict the East-West struggle to the ideological and economic level, where he was convinced history would ultimately prove him right." (540-541) The authors, however, note the tremendous obstacles that the Soviet leader faced in the mistrust on both sides of the Cold War, the difficulties of the Berlin and German issue for both sides, and the challenges posed to Khrushchev by China and nationalistic challenges in the third world. Naftali and Fursenko do suggest that Khrushchev's pressure tactics and brinkmanship, and the U.S. reaction to this, seriously weakened any chances he had to achieve his objectives, and provided support for the view that he was a dangerous gambler who could not be trusted.

### **REVIEWERS:**

**Aleksandr Fursenko**, a leading historian of the Cold War and one of Russia's top specialists on U.S. history, is the chairman of the historical section of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Fursenko graduated from the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) State University in 1951, receiving his candidate's degree in 1954 (thesis topic "The Battle for the Division of China and the American 'Open Door' Doctrine in 1895-1900"). Fursenko is the co-author, with Tim Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-64* (1997) and *Khrushchev's Cold War* (2006). He has also written several major works on U.S. history in Russian, including *The History of U.S. Foreign Policy and Diplomacy* (1994), *The Development of American Government* (1992), and *The Dictionary of American History* (1997). He has also published on international oil politics at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, most notably *The Battle for Oil: The Economic and Politics of International Corporate Conflict over Petroleum, 1900-1930* (1990). He became a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1987, and a full academic in 1990. Since 1996, he has been a member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

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**Timothy Naftali** received his training at Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, and a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1993. He has been at the University of Virginia and served as Director of the Presidential Recordings Program at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs where he directed the team of scholars and staff responsible for transcribing, annotating and interpreting hundreds of telephone conversations and meetings secretly recorded by Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon in the White House. In October 2006, Professor Naftali became the director of the Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archive, and on July 11, 2007 became the first director of the new Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda, California, a nonpartisan federal institution. He is the author of numerous articles and of *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (with Aleksandr Fursenko) and *Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism*. Professor Naftali's latest book, *George H.W. Bush*, will be published in December as part of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s American President Series. He is also working on an international study of terrorist organizations.

**Campbell Craig** received a BA from Carleton College, an MA from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in U.S. Diplomatic History in 1995 from Ohio University. He is Professor of International Relations at the University of Southampton in England. He is author of *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (Columbia University Press, 2003). His forthcoming books include, with Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale University Press, forthcoming early 2008), and, with Fredrik Logevall, *America and the Cold War: A New History* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2009).

**Hope M. Harrison** received her training at Harvard University and Columbia University with a Ph.D. in Political Science in 1993. She is Associate Professor of History and International Affairs, Department of History and the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. She is also Director, Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies, at George Washington University, a Co-director of the George Washington Cold War Group, a Senior Research Fellow, Cold War International History Project, and a Research Fellow, National Security Archive. Her *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton University Press, 2003) received the 2004 Marshall Shulman prize for best book on international affairs/foreign policy of the former Soviet bloc, from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. She has published a number of essays in English and German on the Soviet Union and the Berlin crisis including "The Berlin Wall—an Icon of the Cold War Era?" in *On Both Sides of the Wall: Preserving Monuments and Sites of the Cold War Era*, eds., Leo Schmidt and Henriette von Preuschen (Berlin and Bonn: Westkreuz-Verlag, GmbH, 2005), 18-27; and "Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: A Superally, A Superpower, and the Berlin Wall, 1958-61," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000).

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**Kenneth Osgood** received his B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Barbara, 2001. He joined Florida Atlantic University in 2001 and in 2006-2007 held the Mary Ball Washington Chair in American History at the University College Dublin. He is currently Associate Professor of History and Director of the Alan B. Larkin Symposium on the American Presidency at Florida Atlantic University. He is author of *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (University Press of Kansas, 2006) which received the Herbert Hoover Book Award; co-editor with Klaus Larres of *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); and several articles including "Hearts and Minds: The Unconventional Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4:2 (Spring 2002): 85-107, and "Form before Substance: Eisenhower's Commitment to Psychological Warfare and Negotiations with the Enemy," *Diplomatic History* 24:3 (Summer 2000): 405-433. His current research focuses on *The Enemy of My Enemy: The United States, Britain, and Iraq since 1958* and two edited volumes.

**Vladislav Zubok** earned his Ph.D. at the Institute for the U.S. and Canada Studies of the Academy of Sciences, Moscow. He is an Associate Professor at Temple University. His new book *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* has just appeared, published by the University of North Carolina Press. His *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (1996) with Constantin Pleshakov won the Lionel Gelber Prize as a best English-language book on international relations in 1996. He is also author of "Why Did the Cold War End in 1989? Explanations of 'The Turn'," in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (2000), "Khrushchev and Divided Germany, 1953-1964," in William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev and Abbott Gleason (eds.), *Nikita Khrushchev: Fresh Perspectives on the Last Communist* (2000), and with Hope M. Harrison, "Khrushchev and Nuclear Weapons," in John Gaddis, et. al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb* (1999).

**Review by Campbell Craig, University of Southampton**

**A**lexandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali's new book *Khrushchev's Cold War* follows on from their formidable international history of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *One Hell of a Gamble*. Like this earlier work, *Khrushchev's Cold War* is based upon new archival documentation its authors have managed to obtain from Soviet and other sources, and like it as well it bodes to become our standard history of the subject. Fursenko and Naftali transform the massive amount of raw data they have uncovered into an accessible and compelling history of Nikita Khrushchev and the new kind of Cold War he learned to wage. Below, I offer a couple methodological criticisms of their new book, but these should not detract from this major historical achievement.

**Campbell Craig** received a BA from Carleton College, an MA from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in U.S. Diplomatic History in 1995 from Ohio University. He is Professor of International Relations at the University of Southampton in England. He is author of *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (Columbia University Press, 2003). His forthcoming books include, with Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale University Press, forthcoming early 2008), and, with Fredrik Logevall, *America and the Cold War: A New History* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2009)

*Khrushchev's Cold War* answers so many important questions that a full discussion of all of them would require a full-length article, perhaps even a small book. Fursenko and Naftali have pretty much demolished whatever remained of the 'totalitarian' model of Soviet decision-making, showing how Khrushchev had continually to contend with internal political opposition to his foreign policies, a process that ultimately resulted in his peaceful removal from office. They add to our understanding of the Soviet effort to wage the Cold War in the Third World, highlighting in particular Khrushchev's willingness to deal with leaders like Nasser and Lumumba who wanted little to do with Soviet-style communism. Their chapter on the 1960 U-2 incident and the ensuing collapse of the Paris summit is first-rate, and I would regard it as now the definitive treatment of this under-studied event. They also have many interesting things to say about Khrushchev's role in fostering the polarised politics of the modern Middle East. What is more, they contribute to our understanding of various Cold War policies undertaken by many other countries during the late 1950s and early 1960s, including the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, East Germany, France, Iraq, Communist China, Cuba, Hungary, the Congo, Egypt, and others I might have missed. However, I regard the centre of *Khrushchev's Cold War* to be the story of the Soviet leader's recognition of and response to the nuclear dilemma and his cooperation with American and other leaders to avoid a thermonuclear third world war. For reasons of space, and aware that I am neglecting other important aspects of the book, I will now focus on this story.

Khrushchev came to power in the thermonuclear age. Like his rival, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, by the time he seized control over the Kremlin the decision to acquire

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thermonuclear weaponry had been made. Like Eisenhower, Khrushchev fairly quickly reached the conclusion that a war waged with such bombs would be effectively suicidal, and in so doing he collided with more militaristic subordinates who believed that it must be possible to fight and win a thermonuclear war. But if war was now suicidal, how would it be possible to continue waging the Cold War? The answers Khrushchev came up with were, in a deep sense, identical to those reached by his American adversary.

Khrushchev concluded first that the Soviet Union must adopt a grand strategy of 'peaceful coexistence' with the West. This meant that the belief in an ultimate showdown of arms between the forces of socialism and imperialism that had been implicit in the thinking of his predecessor, Stalin, and really in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism (though not, strictly speaking, Marxism) had to be removed from Soviet military and foreign policy in favour of a strategy of competing with the West along fronts that did not raise the spectre of general war. Central to this new strategy was Khrushchev's decision to spread Soviet socialism throughout the Third World, and to forge alliances with a host of governments in developing nations, even if those governments were not reliably communist.<sup>1</sup> During the first decade of the Cold War, Stalin had concentrated his efforts primarily upon hastily building Soviet military power to contend with American superiority and in opposing in the U.S. in major theatres of confrontation, particularly central Europe and east Asia. Of course, Khrushchev did not abandon this strategy entirely, but rather played a much more cautious game whenever a direct conflict with America was possible.

Fursenko and Naftali also argue, in what I think is their best chapter, 'Grand Design,' that Khrushchev gravitated in the late 1950s, after the desultory Berlin ultimatum crisis, toward a military strategy of minimum nuclear deterrence and cuts in conventional forces. By excluding "general war as deliberate policy," the authors write, Khrushchev hoped to defuse the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and redirect Soviet foreign policy squarely toward the Third World. In pursuing this aim Khrushchev was frustrated by the profoundly irresponsible campaign rhetoric of Democratic candidates for the 1960 election, above all John F. Kennedy, whose palpably false claims of Soviet missile superiority persuaded the Soviet leader that the forces of American militarism—or what Eisenhower would soon call the 'military-industrial complex'—were determined to stoke the fires of Cold War hostility even in the face of thermonuclear war. Reference to the 'forces of militarism and imperialism' was a stock phrase in the Soviet rhetorical arsenal, but in this case, as Fursenko and Naftali plainly show, there was truth to the charge.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a sustained treatment of this new policy, see Arne Westad, *Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> On this point, see Christopher Preble's fine new study, *John F. Kennedy and the Missile Gap* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

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Finally, Khrushchev learned how to manage Cold War confrontation in a thermonuclear age. In the Berlin ultimatum crisis, the Berlin wall crisis, and most dramatically in the Cuban missile crisis, as Fursenko and Naftali demonstrate, Khrushchev evinced a determination both to redress what were, at least to him, clearly inequitable situations in Berlin and Cuba and to prevent the crises he was provoking from leading to war. Khrushchev was under tremendous pressure from his East German allies, the new regime under Castro in Cuba, and also his new rivals for socialist allegiance, China, to stand up to the United States. East Germany was losing thousands of educated workers a month through the open gates of Berlin, Cuba was under a kind of siege by the United States, as was exemplified by the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and China was appealing to socialists in the Third World disillusioned by Khrushchev's desire for peaceful coexistence and aversion to World War Three. It was up to him to prove to these allies that he could confront the American position in Berlin and Cuba without triggering a nuclear war, and, in the end, that is what he did. By forcefully denouncing the anachronistic presence in West Berlin of western forces and threatening a unilateral termination of their occupation rights there, Khrushchev shifted the terms of engagement enough so that he could risk building a wall in Berlin, and despite its dismal testament to the glories of the workers' paradise, the Wall did solve the problem that the East Germans decried without necessitating an American response, as a relieved Kennedy administration quietly understood. By deploying missiles to Cuba, and then, a few months later, dismantling them and taking them home, Khrushchev was able to secure an American guarantee to respect Cuban sovereignty and dismantle the Jupiter and Thor missiles in Turkey. Of course, these gambits could have gone wrong and led to World War Three, in which case we would not be so approving of his diplomacy. The point, as Fursenko and Naftali stress, is that Khrushchev understood that the nuclear age demanded, for a nation that was unwilling simply to back down on every issue, a kind of gamesmanship that recognised that confrontation could go only so far and no further. Games require a kind of collaboration with one's adversary, a common acceptance of certain rules. Luckily, Eisenhower and Khrushchev understood this from the outset, and Kennedy, eventually, did too.

The atomic spy David Greenglass once said that 'the gamble was that the Russians would get it [the atomic bomb] and everything would turn out to be all right. Which it did for them, but not for me.'<sup>3</sup> The great irony in this is that getting the bomb, and thus establishing eventually a system of mutual deterrence, spelled in a deep sense the doom of the Soviet Union. The USSR had never known anything but crisis since its founding in 1917. The early civil war, the Stalinist hell, the Great Patriotic War against Germany, and then the Cold War confrontation with the United States—the pursuit of 'normal' national goals like peace and prosperity were simply absent from the Soviet experience. Russia had become a garrison state, its citizenry and leadership habituated to permanent crisis. On top of this, the Soviet ideology of socialist revolution rejected, by definition, peaceful coexistence; the point, rather, was to change the world by means of violent action. Khrushchev realised that the advent of the nuclear revolution had not only invalidated this

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<sup>3</sup> Greenglass is quoted in Sam Roberts, *The Brother* (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 477.

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objective, but that it also gave the USSR finally the opportunity to focus inwardly on the cultivation of its own domestic economy and the destalinisation of its political culture. I think the most important part of *Khrushchev's Cold War* is Fursenko and Naftali's account of how the Soviet leader tried futilely to impose this radical transformation upon his nation. He was foiled repeatedly, however—by American missile-gap alarmism, the resistance of his own military-industrial complex, and, perhaps most decisive, by the deep contradiction between his new vision and the political *Telos* of the Soviet experiment. If the Kremlin was content to coexist with Capitalism, to worry most about cultivating the national power and welfare of the Soviet state, and to play only at the edges of the Cold War, where no industrial proletariat was to be found, what was the reason for the revolution?

In my view, the historical import of Khrushchev's response to the nuclear revolution is of the very first order. Recognising that the showdown with America was now pointless, Khrushchev set in motion a political logic that could only end in war or defeat for the USSR.. Perhaps he truly believed that the Soviet Union could reform itself and outcompete the United States on the latter's own terms of technological innovation and consumer prosperity, but the doubts Khrushchev and his advisers entertained about this, as Fursenko and Naftali make clear, lead one to wonder whether he really believed it. Certainly, his cynical successor Leonid Brezhnev did not, and the last decades of the Soviet Union reveal a nation playing out a losing hand. Gorbachev and Yeltsin issued the *coup de grace*.

This, however, is my own conclusion. Fursenko and Naftali do not make these kinds of claims, and this unwillingness to speak to issues beyond the subject at hand is disappointing. The authors are reluctant, as they were in *One Hell of a Gamble*, to elaborate at much length, or even any length, on how their arguments contend with competing works or what they might say about larger historiographical questions. As a few critics of their first book observed, they are writing a very traditional kind of history, one that places responsibility for action and consequence solely on the shoulders of human actors, primarily "great men," and one that declines to use its narrative openly as a vehicle for making ideological points. For readers tired of modern works of history (including, yes, diplomatic history) that seem to be much more about winning contemporary intellectual debates than about providing an original account of something that happened in the past, this rather unpretentious attitude is a breath of fresh air. But in *Khrushchev's Cold War* the authors' aversion to big-picture questions seems forced. The final chapter of the book, 'Legacy,' consists of an account of Khrushchev's ouster from office in 1964 and a few brief and fairly bland concluding remarks; I was genuinely surprised by this. Khrushchev was a central player in two of the most important stories of the second half of the twentieth century: the avoidance of a thermonuclear World War Three and the decline and fall of the Soviet experiment. Yet the authors do not use their last chapter to reflect on these monumental events, or to speculate on what they might say about our larger understanding of international relations and Cold War history, or to contrast their findings with those of other historians, such as David Holloway, Hope Harrison, William Taubman, or Vladislav Zubok.

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To make a second criticism, I would also say that the book suffers from an excessively 'international' focus. Over the past decade or so, historians of the Cold War have taken advantage of the opening of archives in the Soviet bloc and elsewhere to provide excellent, archive-based accounts of what was happening on 'the other side of the hill,' to use Basil Liddell-Hart's expression. This is all to the good, coming in the wake of a literature that had been necessarily western-centric before the 1990s. However, an historical narrative of the making of foreign policy that shifts back and forth from Moscow, to Washington, then to London, etc., runs a real risk of providing the reader with a top-down picture of events happening simultaneously in several places that was not available to the participants at the time. In other words: one of the essential features of foreign policy during the Cold War, or any other period, is the fact that its practitioners *do not know* what exactly the other side is doing or thinking, and that therefore to obtain a true understanding of their position, to put oneself in their shoes, it can actually be misleading to read in one paragraph about the thinking of MacMillan and in the next that of Khrushchev. We become privy to insights invisible to the decision-makers of the day.<sup>4</sup>

There are instances, and here I would quickly point to *One Hell of a Gamble*, where this kind of top-down international history is so illustrative that it justifies these dangers. Fursenko and Naftali's study of the Cuban Missile Crisis works on this level for two reasons, in my opinion: first, because both superpowers were concerned with exactly the same problem, namely how to get out of the mess they had made without blowing up the planet; and second, because a central story in *One Hell of a Gamble* was the back-channel talks between Bobby Kennedy and Georgi Bolshakov, a process that was quite literally 'international' and could not be adequately written about otherwise. The nuclear dilemma raised by the missile crisis and the extent to which the two sides were willing to go to escape it both transcended strictly nationalistic foreign-policy making, as the chapter on Cuba in *Khrushchev's Cold War* also reveals.

For a book that purports to give us a deep account of Khrushchev and his Cold War foreign policies, though, the lengthy treatments of what was going on in several governments at once often detract from the story, particularly when we move away from direct international crisis. One of the notable features of the Soviet experiment was precisely its leaders' profound insulation from the rest of the world, and this reality is not conveyed well when the narrative relocates rapidly from Moscow to Bonn to London to Cairo. A major theme of the book is Khrushchev's growing concern that the world was beginning to pass the USSR by. A more isolated picture of how Khrushchev and his colleagues began dimly to perceive this, by the very nature of international politics largely deaf to the cacophony of different views and policies expressed elsewhere, would have strengthened, not weakened, the book. The discussion of American and British and Egyptian policies, as they appeared to Moscow, is important and necessary, and as already mentioned I regard the authors' treatment of American nuclear politics to be first-rate. But when we learn simultaneously about the making of these policies, about the motivations and capabilities

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent discussion of this problem, see Robert McMahon, "The study of American Foreign Relations: National History or International History?" *Diplomatic History* 14 (Fall 1990), pp. 554-64.

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of statesmen in Washington and London and Cairo, we obtain a perception of events that was unavailable to Nikita Khrushchev and lose thereby a feel for his predicament.

In the end, these historiographical complaints get trampled by the sheer substance and brilliance of *Khrushchev's Cold War*. The authors have acknowledged the misattribution of some documents, and in my judgment they have not handled the raising of this issue particularly well. As an historian of American foreign policy and of the nuclear age rather than a Soviet specialist I am not qualified to judge the gravity of this problem, but as far as I am able to tell, the error does not appear to represent a serious breach of academic integrity, and it almost certainly does not invalidate the larger thesis of the book. I continue to believe Naftali and Fursenko have written the leading account of Soviet Cold War foreign policy during Khrushchev's reign, our best historical explanation of the origins of Soviet decline, and, in fact, one of the best books yet written about the history of the Cold War.

Due to the authors' sometimes exclusive access to Russian documents, scholars have been eagerly awaiting this second book by the Russian-American team after their first monograph, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, came out in 1997.<sup>1</sup> Written in the same engaging style as the first book, *Khrushchev's Cold War* examines Soviet foreign policy and Soviet-U.S. relations, focusing on crises in Suez (1956), Iraq (1958), Berlin (1958-60 and 1961-1962), the Congo (1960), Laos (1960), and Cuba (1962). The book provides some important new pieces of information, lots of great details on decision making within both the Kremlin and the White House, and a wide-ranging use of Russian and American sources. The book has many strengths but also some weaknesses.

The portrait Fursenko and Naftali paint of Khrushchev differs from those offered by other scholarly experts on Khrushchev, William Taubman, Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, as well from my own picture of Khrushchev. Fursenko and Naftali's Khrushchev is more of a pragmatist and realist, words they use repeatedly to describe the Soviet leader (49, 58, and 82). In Taubman's Pulitzer prize-winning biography, *Khrushchev: The Man and his Era* and in Zubok and Pleshakov's Gelber prize-winning *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Khrushchev's ebullient, earthy, ideologically-inspired, insecure and paradoxically overconfident personality stands out as the guiding influence on his foreign policy (although other factors, such as the international environment, are also taken into account).<sup>2</sup> Fursenko and Naftali start out

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and his Era* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003); and Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). In my own work, focusing on Khrushchev's policy toward East Germany and Berlin, Khrushchev's ideological excitement about and commitment to East Germany is very

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the book playing up these aspects of Khrushchev's personality as the explanatory influence on his foreign policy, but they then proceed to show Khrushchev to be a pragmatist, responding in a realpolitik way to the international environment time after time. All of these authors recognize that Khrushchev's policies were influenced by both his personality and the international (as well as domestic) environment, but the emphasis is different.

Fursenko and Naftali play down the role of ideology as compared to pragmatism in Khrushchev's foreign policy until 1960 when they suddenly start talking about more of an ideological influence on Khrushchev's policies in the Third World with countries such as the Congo, Cuba, and Laos. After eleven chapters presenting a very pragmatic picture of Khrushchev's foreign policy, suddenly at the start of Chapter 12 on Castro and Lumumba, the authors tell us: "Recent developments had encouraged Khrushchev to pay even more attention to developing ideological allies in the third world." (292) But in previous chapters, including on the Third World, the authors had barely mentioned ideology. The previous case studies of Soviet policy toward the Third World, focusing on Egypt and Iraq, emphasized Soviet pragmatism. Did Khrushchev suddenly find ideology in 1960? The authors don't explain. Were there some issues where Khrushchev was more guided by his ideological beliefs and other issues where realpolitik dominated? Fursenko and Naftali don't tell us, leaving the reader a little confused about their analysis.

*Khrushchev's Cold War* does a fantastic job of showing the reader the perceptions and misperceptions the leaders in the Kremlin and the White House had of each other and what they knew and did not about what the other was up to. Nowhere in the book do Fursenko and Naftali do a better job of taking us inside the tight circle of decision makers in Moscow and Washington than with the Cuban Missile Crisis in Chapter 19. These pages are particularly gripping as Kennedy and his colleagues deliberate on how to respond to the Soviet missiles in Cuba, the Soviets wait anxiously to hear what Kennedy will say in his speech on October 22 (at which Kennedy announced the missiles and a U.S. quarantine of Cuba), Kennedy waits to see whether the Soviets will back down, the Soviets consult about what to do in light of the quarantine, and both increasingly look for a way out of the crisis. Here, also, we learn for the first time that Khrushchev would have given up the missiles in Cuba for just the U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba without the additional U.S. promise to pull missiles out of Turkey. (490)

On Khrushchev's motivations for deploying the missiles in Cuba, however, Fursenko and Naftali vacillate. In "*One Hell of a Gamble*," they argued that by deploying missiles in Cuba, Khrushchev aimed to prevent a U.S. invasion of Cuba and also to prevent the Cubans, particularly Anibal Escalante and Che Guevera, from siding with the Chinese in the Sino-Soviet dispute. In *Khrushchev's Cold War*, they adopt a much more U.S.-Soviet geopolitical explanation: "Creating a kind of parity between the superpowers in the balance of terror had been Khrushchev's primary motivation for putting the missiles in Cuba." (506) Yet at

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important. Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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another point in this recent book, they argue: “[Khrushchev] had taken this risk [of missiles in Cuba] to make future gains in Central Europe [i.e. Berlin] and Southeast Asia more than he had done this to protect Fidel Castro.” (492)

The authors’ discussion of the role of Khrushchev’s aims in Berlin during the Cuban Missile Crisis is rather confusing. They also aren’t clear on whether Khrushchev was trying to deter the U.S. or compel the U.S. by the missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev told a Soviet delegation headed to Cuba in late May to persuade Castro to accept Soviet missiles that the missiles were meant “to scare them [the U.S.], to restrain them [from attacking Cuba].” (436)<sup>3</sup> But then a few pages later Fursenko and Naftali cite a July 1, 1962 Presidium meeting at which Khrushchev supposedly linked the missiles in Cuba to his efforts to get an advantageous settlement in Berlin. (441-443) And several pages after that, in a footnote which should have been in the text, the authors state: “We think it unlikely that Khrushchev had West Berlin in the front of his mind when he decided to put missiles in Cuba during his visit to Bulgaria. Khrushchev’s plans for 1962 were characteristically dynamic. In May the Cuban operation had unfocused goals, reflecting the fact that the operation stemmed from a general impatience with the worldwide balance of power. By July, however, Khrushchev was clearly working out a more specific strategy for a major political offensive in 1962, one that would take final form only after Kennedy turned down Moscow’s last effort at a diplomatic settlement over West Berlin.” (see 611 for note 23 from 446) The analysis in this note is more careful than in the text.

The authors draw attention to their new findings, telling the reader in multiple cases, “until the top secret Kremlin Presidential documents were opened up in 2003, we didn’t know” x or y.” One important theme on which they provide new information concerns nuclear diplomacy. Fursenko and Naftali demonstrate that Khrushchev (erroneously) believed that his nuclear threats to the West over Suez in 1956 (this was previously known, but now we have more details) and Iraq in 1958 (this was not previously known) were the main reasons the West backed down. (134-137, 169-184) This belief led Khrushchev to make nuclear threats during the Berlin Crisis and to deploy missiles in Cuba.

In addition to more inside details of Kremlin decision making during the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Khrushchev's Cold War* also provides readers with the first glimpse ever inside Kremlin files on the downing of Francis Gary Powers’ U-2 flight on 1 May 1960 and on the Soviet interrogation of Powers. Fursenko and Naftali again have the readers on the edge of their seats as they go back and forth between the Soviet Union and the U.S. on Powers’ flight, the downing of the flight and the pilot, the American concern about what happened to them, Soviet baiting of the Americans, American assertions that a weather plane was downed, the dramatic Soviet revelation that they had the plane and the living pilot, and then the interrogation and trial of Powers. (260-280) The highpoints of the book are scenes like this where the authors can take the reader inside both the Soviet and U.S. sides

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<sup>3</sup> Their note on the source for this information is not to a document but to their own earlier book (p. 182 of *One Hell of a Gamble*), which is rather frustrating.

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of a crisis to watch what each side was thinking, assuming about the other, wondering about the other, and then reacting to the other. The narrative style is very effective.

Fursenko and Naftali do a great job of providing detailed tidbits of information to really give the reader a feel for things and to give the reader a sense of the multiple domestic and foreign issues on Khrushchev's mind at certain moments. For example, in midst of discussing Khrushchev's concerns about the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and his excitement about Yuri Gagarin's successful orbit around the earth in 1960, the authors tell us of Khrushchev's simultaneous worries about the poor state of housing in the Soviet Union and his likely relief that during the huge festivities for Gagarin in May 1960, "none of the balconies filled with onlookers collapsed during the show." (346) Later in the spring of 1962, Fursenko and Naftali again give the reader a sense of the combined Soviet domestic and international concerns, writing of set-backs in the development of long-range nuclear missiles and in the economy leading Khrushchev to ask minister of defense Rodion Malinovsky to devise a "cheaper shortcut to becoming competitive with the Americans in ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles]. (429-431)

The authors rely on multiple document collections from both the former Soviet Union and the United States for this book. In Moscow, they used files from the Archives of the President of the Russian Federation, the Kremlin Archives (the Presidium protocols, which Fursenko has published in Russian<sup>4</sup>), the Foreign Ministry Archive, the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI—the Central Committee archive), the Central Archive of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the Archive of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Archive of the Main Intelligence Administration of the Russian General Staff (GRU), the unpublished part of Anastas Mikoyan's memoirs in RGASPI, the Historical Archive and Military Memorial Center of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AGSRF). In the U.S., the authors used files from the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon and Johnson Libraries, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Hoover Institution, and the National Security Archive. They also consulted files at the British National Archives and conducted interviews with former policymakers in the U.S. and Russia.

The most important and controversial part of Fursenko and Naftali's sourcebase are some of the Russian documents they were able to use. Several of these Russian archives (the Archives of the President of the Russian Federation, as well as the intelligence and military archives) are off-limits to the vast majority of scholars and only accessible to those with special connections, which Fursenko seemingly has (and pictures in the book on Soviet-Cuban relations featuring the KGB station chief in Havana, Aleksandr Alekseyev, Mikoyan, Raul Castro, and Khrushchev from Fursenko's personal collection hint at this). This is problematic in and of itself, of course, since other scholars cannot assess the documents on

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<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko, ed., *Archivii Kremlya: Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004).

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their own to see if they come to the same conclusions that Fursenko and Naftali do. Equally problematic is that apparently only Fursenko could see some of these documents, not Naftali. My understanding is that sometimes Naftali could not even see Fursenko's notes on documents. Given that Fursenko does not have a good track record on the accuracy of his research, this is grounds for concern.<sup>5</sup>

There are occasional jumps in the narrative that leave the reader behind. Thus, the authors describe in detail in Chapter 13 the civil war in Laos in 1960 and the Soviet and U.S. responses, and then the authors return to Laos suddenly about one hundred pages later announcing the late July 1962 U.S.-Soviet Geneva agreement to neutralize Laos. There is insufficient explanation of the lead-up to the Geneva agreement and insufficient analysis of how the Laos agreement fits in with the picture Fursenko and Naftali paint of Khrushchev preparing for a showdown by deploying missiles in Cuba. (449)

Similarly, in writing about the fall of 1962, the authors suddenly talk about Khrushchev's "plan for ending the cold war in November." (462, 464) These are Fursenko and Naftali's words, not Khrushchev's and are meant to demonstrate the authors' view of what Khrushchev was thinking: namely, that if he could successfully deploy the missiles in Cuba without the U.S. finding out, could come up with a plan to have UN troops replace Western troops in West Berlin, and could accomplish a nuclear test ban treaty with the U.S., he would have ended the cold war. It strikes this reader as problematic that the authors use such dramatic words without backing them up with any analysis about how unlikely it was that the West would see these moves as bringing an end to the cold war.

There are several important moments in the cold war that the authors cover only in a cursory and sometimes misleading manner: Khrushchev's February 1956 secret speech, the Sino-Soviet split, and the building of the Berlin Wall. It may be that Fursenko and Naftali felt that William Taubman had covered Khrushchev's motivations for and Soviet deliberations about the secret speech so extensively that they did not have much more to add, but they barely cite Taubman here. Furthermore, in a book focusing on Khrushchev's policies in the cold war, this speech was a crucial moment and the two paragraphs Fursenko and Naftali devote to it are insufficient. (86-87) The authors' conceptual framework for the book examines the influence of Khrushchev's personality and the international environment on his policies. How do they think those influences played out in this case? They don't tell us.

The Sino-Soviet split was a world-altering development during Khrushchev's time in power. Yet the authors devote no specific attention to this; they mention China here and

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the following article which contains many factual errors, multiple omissions of sources, and interpretations without substantial basis: A. A. Fursenko, "Kak Buila Postroenna Berlinskaia Stena," ("How the Berlin Wall Was Built"), *Istoricheskie Zapiski*, No. 4 (2001), 73-90. For more on the problem of exclusive access to sources and factual errors in the book, focusing on the Cuban Missile Crisis sections, see Michael Dobbs' review of the book, "Can't Verify, Can't Trust," *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2007, C3. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/31/AR2007013102105.html>.

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there connected to a variety of issues. Even though the focus of the book is meant to be on Soviet-U.S. relations, developments in Soviet-Chinese relations had a significant impact on Soviet-U.S. relations and the lack of a specific discussion on this is a weakness of the book.<sup>6</sup> Is it just that the authors have chosen to focus on the U.S. as Khrushchev's main international interlocutor, or do they think that China was not important to Khrushchev? If so, does that mean, again, that Khrushchev had a more pragmatic approach to international relations than ideological, as the authors argue at many points? They don't explain.

On yet another important issue of the cold war, the crisis in Berlin and the building of the Berlin Wall, Fursenko and Naftali write in an incomplete, misleading way. They speak of "Khrushchev's Wall" and "Khrushchev's iron ring" (374-377, 383-384), completely ignoring the vast amount of evidence, including from Russian documents, about the East German role in pushing the reluctant Soviets into finally acquiescing to their pleas to close the border in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> They simplistically assert that "[t]he decision to build the Berlin Wall was Khrushchev's alone to make" and that "[h]e therefore bore sole responsibility" for it. (375) Fursenko and Naftali do at least say that the Berlin Wall decision "was in part a reaction to a suggestion from [East German leader Walter] Ulbricht" (374), but their focus on the Soviet political and military decisions obscures the significant role Ulbricht had played in the years leading up to 1961. This role was two-fold: on the one hand, Ulbricht regularly lobbied for closing the border in Berlin and several times initiated policies that the Soviets saw as unilateral efforts to close the border; and on the other hand, Ulbricht maintained a hard-line regime at home (in spite of multiple Soviet requests that he moderate his many policies that led thousands of people to flee the country) that ultimately left the Soviets no choice but to agree to his request to seal off West Berlin if they wanted to avoid the collapse of East Germany.

In multiple places, the book suffers from poor copy editing. For example, although there is a note 57 on p. 378, in the endnotes for that page on p. 601, there is in fact no note 57, but there are two note 60s. In another example, in discussing a key presidium meeting of 20 November 1958 and the role of Mikoyan in restraining Khrushchev on threatening the West over Berlin, the actual note 48 on p. 575 is mistakenly to a document in the British National Archives instead of to the presidium meeting from the Kremlin archives. There are typos in multiple places in the text and the notes.<sup>8</sup> There are also many instances of omission of sources, including p. 214, note 1 (which gives a description related to Mikoyan but no source), p. 428 about Castro and Escalante with Castro reading a translation of an article in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* with no source given, and p. 435 about Khrushchev's instructions to Malinovsky about Soviet missiles in Cuba with no source.

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent analysis of the Chinese side of the cold war, see Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> I cover this subject at length in my book, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*.

<sup>8</sup> For example, p. 582, note 6 mistakenly cites Dedlow instead of Pedlow.

## ***Khrushchev's Cold War Roundtable***

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In spite of some omissions and errors, *Khrushchev's Cold War* offers a fascinating portrayal of the dynamics of Khrushchev's leadership and of Soviet-U.S. interactions and is written in an often gripping, page-turning way. The combination of new sources, new information, and good writing will likely make this a popular book for classes on the cold war and on the Soviet Union.

Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali unwittingly became virtual celebrities of the blogosphere when the controversial White House political strategist Karl Rove stepped off Air Force One holding a copy of *Khrushchev's Cold War*. After newspapers published a photograph of Rove carrying the book in his hands on 20 March 2007, bloggers wanted to know: why was Rove, who is facing a possible congressional subpoena, reading up on the shoe-banging leader of the now-defunct "evil empire"? What interest could he have in a buffoonish but powerful leader whose reckless adventurism nearly brought the world to cataclysmic ruin?<sup>1</sup>

Of course we can only speculate about what inspired Rove's interest in the impulsive Soviet leader. Khrushchev himself has been subjected to endless speculation, both during his life and after. Perhaps more than any other Kremlin boss, he embodied Winston Churchill's famous characterization of Russia: "a riddle, wrapped in a

mystery, inside an enigma." After all, Khrushchev was the same man who initiated the "thaw" and liberalized Soviet society but sent the Red Army into Hungary; who stood side-by-side with Stalin during the Great Terror but exposed and decried the evils of Stalinism; who spoke earnestly about the need to abolish atomic weapons but presided over the biggest nuclear explosion in history; and who promised peaceful coexistence, but practiced a reckless form of brinksmanship that nearly provoked thermonuclear war.

In seeking to make sense of this complex and puzzling man's foreign policy, the authors hearken back to Churchill, who, in the same radio broadcast that featured the famous "enigma" quote, perceived a key to understanding the actions of Russia: "That key is

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<sup>1</sup> The photograph was taken by the Associated Press's Pablo Martinez Monsivais. The picture accompanied numerous articles about Rove, including an AP article by David Espo: "Showdown Looms in Attorney Firings Probe," *Boston Globe*, 21 March 2007, available at [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/21/bush\\_warns\\_dems\\_to\\_take\\_offer\\_in\\_firings/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/21/bush_warns_dems_to_take_offer_in_firings/) (5 April 2007).

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Russian national interest." To Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev's seemingly erratic and impulsive foreign policy contained within it a perceptible internal logic: it was animated by realistic calculations of power and interest.

Above all else, Khrushchev was motivated by a candid appreciation of Soviet vulnerability. He recognized that the USSR lagged far behind the United States in the strategic arms race and he believed the West held the initiative in the contest for allies and markets in the Third World. If Khrushchev's policies appeared erratic and unpredictable, they did so because Khrushchev was almost desperate to prove that his country could stand on equal footing with the West. Desperate times, it appeared, demanded desperate measures. Khrushchev's brinkmanship – which provoked dangerous crises over Berlin and Cuba – stemmed from his belief that only by threatening war, could he compel the west to make peace.

The authors also reveal that Khrushchev's foreign policy was shaped by his country's peculiar form of domestic politics. Khrushchev may have masterminded the most confrontational policies directed at the United States, but he did not govern unchallenged as Stalin had. He needed to build consensus within the Soviet leadership, and on more than one occasion, he needed to ward off serious challenges to his position. As often as not, his colleagues in the presidium, especially Anastas Mikoyan, pushed him to tone down his more aggressive positions.

In short, Fursenko and Naftali suggest that it was the interplay between domestic politics and *realpolitik* that governed Khrushchev's Cold War. They present Khrushchev neither as a romantic ideologue, nor as a schizophrenic menace – as he has often appeared in earlier accounts. Rather, they portray him as a political realist, driven by pragmatic concerns about his country's national interests and his own political future. They paint a balanced and complex portrait of Khrushchev – one that is neither over laden with Cold War orthodoxy, nor unduly apologetic.

*Khrushchev's Cold War* is decidedly more analytical than the authors' previous collaborative work – *One Hell of a Gamble*, their remarkable account of the Cuban Missile Crisis – and it is thus more compelling and important. Carefully integrating perspectives from both east and west, the book is much more than a history of Khrushchev's foreign policy. It is one of the most authoritative and sophisticated narratives of international relations during the early Cold War. It represents brilliant international history. Exhaustively researched, the book is well informed by a wide-range of previously inaccessible sources from both communist and western archives. Rich in detail, it is also beautifully written: an engrossing page-turner that moves effortlessly from Moscow to Washington, Berlin to Havana, Cairo to Leopoldville, Vientiane to Baghdad. It is an extraordinary achievement.

The authors lead us through the maze of perceptions and misperceptions that propelled the Cold War through crisis after crisis during Khrushchev's reign. Along the way, they explore the issues that prevented a meaningful relaxation of tensions from developing in

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the decade and a half following the death of Joseph Stalin. Fursenko and Naftali suggest that Khrushchev's appeal for "peaceful coexistence" was more than mere rhetoric or propaganda – as most U.S. officials believed at the time. "Khrushchev was different," they write, in sincerely seeking disarmament. (255) "Underneath the bluster was a leader who hoped for a diplomatic settlement." (223)

Khrushchev's pursuit of *détente* peaked in 1959-1960, after he returned from an unprecedented tour of the United States. Announcing his belief that President Eisenhower "sincerely wishes to see the end of the cold war," Khrushchev worked earnestly to demilitarize the Cold War. He felt that the time was ripe because the Soviet Union had just acquired the ability to launch a nuclear missile attack on the United States, which provided for a form of "minimum deterrence." (243) The authors argue that President Eisenhower was "on the same wavelength" as Khrushchev, and shared his determination to eliminate or reduce nuclear arsenals – a conclusion which some historians of Eisenhower's presidency, including myself, might dispute. In any event, Khrushchev's pursuit of *détente* foundered on the missile gap and U-2 crises at the end of the 1960s – events that he blamed on the militarists who controlled American foreign policy. By the time of John F. Kennedy's election, Khrushchev had decided on a more confrontational approach, ironically at the moment the new president began exploring avenues for East-West cooperation. It would not be until after the Cuban Missile Crisis that leaders from the two superpowers would make progress on disarmament by signing the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963.

The authors' treatment of the Third World is particularly notable. The field of Cold War history has been divided between those who take a Eurocentric view of the conflict, and those who take a global perspective by stressing the importance of the Third World. All too rarely the two sides come together. Fursenko and Naftali rightly explore the intersection between the Cold War in Europe and the Cold War in the Third World, showing how developments in one area had dramatic consequences in the other.

Khrushchev, for example, learned precisely the wrong lesson from a crisis that erupted over Iraq in 1958. After a military coup overthrew the pro-western Hashemite dynasty – which had ruled Iraq as a virtual proxy of the British empire since the 1920s – the Americans and British seriously contemplated military action to force "regime change" in Iraq. Khrushchev believed that he had compelled his American and British adversaries to scrap these invasion plans by threatening a wider war. In fact, Fursenko and Naftali show, Khrushchev's threats had virtually no impact on American and British decision making during the Iraq crisis. They dismissed Khrushchev's threats as mere bluffs and opted not to invade for other reasons. But Khrushchev was emboldened nevertheless. He concluded that his brinkmanship worked, and it was this confidence that led him to initiate the first Berlin crisis in 1958.

The book also includes fresh revelations and interpretations of Cold War confrontations in such areas as Egypt, Cuba, Congo, and Laos. Whereas American leaders saw the Kremlin's hidden hand behind the crises that erupted in these and other parts of the world, the

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authors argue that “in the third world Khrushchev had rarely been the initiator of conflicts. More often than not the Soviets had reacted to opportunities.” (360) Fursenko and Naftali suggest that in fact Khrushchev was often reluctant to get involved in Third World conflicts. When he did interfere, he did so cautiously – or at least more cautiously than western observers supposed. Only once did Khrushchev deliberately foment unrest in the developing world; in the middle of the second Berlin crisis of 1961, he ordered the KGB to create a “hotbed of unrest” in Latin America to weaken U.S. resolve over Berlin. (379) Overall, *Khrushchev's Cold War* confirms the view of those diplomatic historians who have argued that the United States misinterpreted and exaggerated the Soviet threat in the Third World. Moreover, the authors point out: “it was the democratic West and not the Soviet Union that considered the use of political assassination as a means of increasing its influence in the third world.” (314)

Although *Khrushchev's Cold War* brilliantly integrates a wide-array of factors that shaped Cold War international relations – intelligence, military strength, personalities, perceptions, and domestic politics – it is strangely silent on one of the most defining features of the Cold War competition: ideology. Khrushchev may have been a realist, but he was at the same time an ideologue. We are left wondering what impact Khrushchev's seemingly heartfelt commitment to communism had on his approach to international relations. By placing *realpolitik* and domestic politics at the heart of their interpretation of Khrushchev, Fursenko and Naftali offer an important corrective to those who have attributed too much to ideology, but one wonders if the authors went too far the other way, missing an opportunity to advance our understandings of the impact of ideology on Cold War politics.

The book's achievement is also dampened by controversy surrounding the authors' sources and methods. Some historians are made uneasy by the authors' privileged access to Russian archives: certain archival sources used in the book have been available only to the authors and cannot be subjected to verification or cross-examination by other scholars. Michael Dobbs brought widespread attention to such concerns by publishing a brutal critique in the *Washington Post* – an unsparing and overblown review that warrants special mention here. Dobbs alleged that scholars can neither trust nor verify Fursenko's and Naftali's conclusions because of their privileged access to sources, which he implied came with strings attached. This charge needs qualification. While Fursenko and Naftali did indeed have privileged access to some sources – an unfortunate state of affairs – the vast majority of the sources used in *Khrushchev's Cold War* are open and readily available.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A careful analysis of the book's footnotes reveals that, although the closed presidential archives provided useful insights on a few key issues, most of the authors' interpretive conclusions are based on documents from the Soviet Foreign Ministry Archive and from the so-called “Malin Notes” – which are open to other researchers – not to mention other archives and document collections from the United States, Britain, and France. Of a total of 1735 footnotes, only a small percentage refer to sources closed to other scholars.

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Dobbs's more worrisome assertion concerned what he called "glaring" factual errors in the authors' two collaborative books: *Khrushchev's Cold War* and *One Hell of a Gamble*. The books are "marred by sloppy research," Dobbs charged, before turning to his damning conclusion: "The errors are so numerous that it becomes difficult to have much confidence in the authors' uncheckable citation from Soviet archival documents that remain closed to other scholars."<sup>3</sup>

Dobbs went too far in leveling these serious allegations. He identified five errors, each of which pertains to the Cuban Missile Crisis (the subject of Dobbs' current research). One relates to the military rank of an American pilot who was shot down during the crisis. Fursenko and Naftali got it wrong in both books, Dobbs pointed out – a lamentable oversight, but hardly one that changes our understanding of those terrible thirteen days in October 1962. Dobbs also alleged that the authors confused the date of a note sent to Moscow during the crisis, but the purported error is neither calamitous nor indisputable. Fursenko and Naftali write that an American diplomatic note about submarine identification procedures was sent to Moscow on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. This is a reasonable conclusion to draw from the documentary record, for at an "ExComm" meeting on October 24<sup>th</sup> a State Department official repeatedly told President Kennedy that he sent the message to the Soviets "last night."<sup>4</sup> If there is good reason to doubt this source, Dobbs does not tell us. One of the other inaccuracies identified by Dobbs relates to Soviet ships and submarines that were carrying weapons to Cuba – a confusion that results more from the fragmentary and contradictory nature of the source material than from alleged sloppiness on the part of the authors.<sup>5</sup>

The one significant error identified by Dobbs pertains to a misquote from a Soviet presidium meeting during the midst of the crisis, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Fursenko and Naftali write that Anastas Mikoyan confronted Khrushchev at the meeting and "pleaded for moderation." According to the authors, Mikoyan wondered aloud whether Khrushchev's instructions to Soviet commanders in Cuba might "mean the start of a thermonuclear war." (472) Dobbs corrected the authors: it was Khrushchev, not Mikoyan, who expressed concern that his instructions might provoke a nuclear war. This is an especially regrettable slip-up since Mikoyan is such an important figure in *Khrushchev's Cold War*, a voice of restraint and caution during some of the most tense moments of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet this mistake – however unfortunate – does not really undermine the authors' overall judgments about either Khrushchev or Mikoyan. Their analysis does not hinge on the

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Dobbs, "Can't Verify, Can't Trust," *Washington Post*, 1 February 2007.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/31/AR2007013102105.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See *Khrushchev's Cold War*, pg. 481; and the comments by U. Alexis Johnson in Philip Zelikow and Ernest May, eds., *Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy, The Great Crisis* (New York: Norton, 2001), vol. 3, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Identifying the ships required meshing U.S. Navy tracking information on the submarines (which use NATO designators) with less reliable and fragmentary information from the Soviet side. See *Khrushchev's Cold War*, pgs. 614-15, note 37.

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transposed quotation. It is conceivable that closer scrutiny could reveal other errors in the book, but absent such evidence scholars should not take Dobbs's overblown criticism too seriously.

In any event, if we are truly to understand the puzzle that was Khrushchev, we will need to get beyond quibbling over details and engage in spirited debate over larger interpretive questions about the meaning and significance of Khrushchev's foreign policy. On this score, anyone who has tried to make sense of Khrushchev can appreciate the enormous contribution that Fursenko and Naftali have made with *Khrushchev's Cold War*.

**Review by Vladislav Zubok, Temple University**

The book is a *tour de force* of Cold War diplomatic history, wonderfully written, rich in detail, with marvelous descriptions of places, circumstances, and protagonists. Fursenko and Naftali managed to write a book that is even better researched than their previous one, *One Hell of a Gamble*. The book is broader in scope, describing all the main international developments of the Cold War during Khrushchev's rise to power and ending with his fall. The book gives the reader the real tissue of international relations, with its nuts-and-bolts, perceptions and misperceptions ("perception is a king in foreign policy"), intelligence coups and failures, references to military, economic, and even cultural developments, and a host of the valuable trivia that historians cherish.

**Vladislav Zubok** earned his Ph.D. at the Institute for the U.S. and Canada Studies of the Academy of Sciences, Moscow. He is an Associate Professor at Temple University. His new book *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* has just appeared, published by the University of North Carolina Press. His *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (1996) with Constantin Pleshakov won the Lionel Gelber Prize as a best English-language book on international relations in 1996. He is also author of "Why Did the Cold War End in 1989? Explanations of 'The Turn'," in Arne Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (2000), "Khrushchev and Divided Germany, 1953-1964," in William Taubman, *Sergei Khrushchev and Abbott Gleason* (eds.), *Nikita Khrushchev: Fresh Perspectives on the Last Communist* (2000), and with Hope M. Harrison, "Khrushchev and Nuclear Weapons," in John Gaddis, et. al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb* (1999).

The book benefited from Aleksandr Fursenko's exceptionally good access to the ex-Soviet archives, and from his energetic search for new documentation. The authors used numerous documents from the archives of the FSB (successor to the KGB), GRU (military intelligence), and Foreign Ministry. The most important new archives are the minutes of the Presidium of the CC CPSU (made by Vladimir Malin, head of the General Department of the CC apparatus), stenographic reports of the Presidium discussions, and additional materials from the Presidium's protocols. Fursenko and Naftali did a great job triangulating and checking these new sources with Western materials, and filled up numerous "blank pages" in the Kremlin decision-making record with the help of the published and unpublished memoirs by the Soviet leaders as well as some interviews.

The Presidium materials (most of the protocols, minutes, steno, and attached documents) have been published in two volumes (the third is forthcoming) by Fursenko in Russia (edition ROSSPEN). Yet, numerous other sources they use in the book to reconstruct events and discussions remain off limits. This puts the authors in the enviable position: they can argue with historiography, but historiography cannot argue back. It is especially the case of the Kremlin debates and who said what. The book, because it was written for a broad audience, quotes those debates at length. Yet, many of them are reconstructions, from Malin's notes or other sources that are inaccessible for the rest of us. In describing

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the Presidium debate on October 22, 1962, the authors quote from the notes of Ivan Serov, head of the GRU, taken at the meeting. These notes came from the GRU archives. The main points of the debates on the use of nuclear weapons and on Mikoyan's special stand apparently came from these notes. Yet, until we see them, it is hard to evaluate the authors' interpretation of this Presidium meeting.

Unfortunately, there is no section in the book that evaluates the sources and the authors' methodology of dealing with them – an essential element for any monograph, but especially required for this book which was researched and written in such an “unusual” manner.

The reader will not get much from the book about Khrushchev's background. The impact of the Russian revolution, Bolshevik anti-imperialist ideology of world revolution (Khrushchev was briefly a Trotskyite), Stalinism, and Great Patriotic War on Khrushchev is barely mentioned (one page in the Introduction); the war experience is not mentioned at all. Apparently, the authors decided to ignore the background because of other authoritative publications (they refer to William Taubman's masterful biography). Yet, in my view, they could have referred to Khrushchev's life and background more in describing and explaining his foreign policy motives and “lessons.”

The book does not dwell much on the three years (1953-55) when Khrushchev learned the ropes of foreign policy and security policy. Some of the brief contentions are dubious (e.g. the one that “the protection of East Germany was not the organizing principle of the Kremlin's German strategy” under Stalin (26). In my research, I came to the opposite conclusion. In this instance, as some others, the authors prefer to make “authoritative” statements rather than recognizing the remaining ambiguity and the room for different interpretations.

It has been long a mystery for the West as to why Soviet international behavior, relatively moderate and cautious in 1953-56, later shifted to such a dangerous militant track. The book's answer is clear: Khrushchev's personality. The book relies heavily on Taubman's reconstruction of Khrushchev, and supports Taubman's conclusions. Khrushchev's underdog identity and his fear of retreat before the predominant U.S. forces made him a fervent promoter of the movements of national liberation around the world. The impact of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideology is not discussed systematically in the book, but its materials convincingly speak about it. Remarkable ideological optimism co-existed in Khrushchev's mind and soul with the fear of losing the battle with the “imperialists.” Khrushchev's infamous ad-libbing and “hare-brained schemes” come off strongly in the book. Even after Taubman's biography, the details of Khrushchev's behavior in this book leaves one dumbfounded by the degree of his imprudence, impatience, and sometimes ignorance.

The consequences of Khrushchev's misjudgments, the authors argue, could have been much more serious for the world's peace, but for the figure of Anastas Mikoyan. He emerges as a second major protagonist after Khrushchev, prudent and experienced. At

almost every dangerous point, when Khrushchev's impetuosity and ignorance produced an international crisis, Mikoyan was there, like a guardian angel, to "save the world." It seems especially true during the key Presidium discussions in November 1958 and in October-November, 1962. The pages on the origins of the Berlin ultimatum of November 27, 1958) read like a political novel. In my opinion, the authors push it a trifle too much, when they claim that Mikoyan plotted and fought against Khrushchev's decision to destroy the Potsdam framework of talks on Berlin. The authors' source is Mikoyan's memoirs and his unpublished dictations (parts of them are available in the Volkogonov Papers), and the nature of this source speaks for itself. Still, crucially, Malin's notes and the stenographic reports of the Presidium discussions support the generally moderating and positive contribution of Mikoyan to Soviet Cold War policies.

The main contribution of the book concerns the history of the great crises of the Cold War: Suez, Berlin, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The authors confirm what scholars only suspected earlier: Khrushchev profoundly misperceived the motives for the U.S. restraint in the Middle East in 1956-58. Not only during the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt, but also during the Iraqi crisis of 1958, the USSR lacked any power-projection capability to help the "national-liberation regimes" in Egypt, Syria, and then Iraq. Khrushchev's cuts to the navy only made this problem more painful, and Soviet missiles were still not deployed (as British and presumably U.S. intelligence knew). As a result, however, when the Western powers withdrew from Egypt, and in 1958 from Lebanon and Jordan, Khrushchev interpreted this as a success of a Soviet nuclear bluff. The chapter on the Iraq crisis, incidentally, brings a major historiographical revelation. It shows how Khrushchev's perceptions veered dangerously apart from the reality and the motives behind Western policies.

The Suez crisis was the first time when Khrushchev's personal intervention, his impatience and rudeness, began to change the "moderate" outlook of Soviet foreign policy. His insecurity, the authors argue, peaked in October 1956, when he feared "losing" both Hungary and Egypt (130). In October-November 1958, the same combination of impatience, insecurity, and impetuosity, made Khrushchev pose the Berlin ultimatum to the Western powers.

Among the explanations for Khrushchev's brinkmanship in 1958-62, Fursenko and Naftali privilege one: his grand scheme of achieving a *détente* and saving Soviet resources for the rapid construction of the communist "paradise." They add to the known evidence on Khrushchev's belief, after his trip to the United States, that he was on the way towards this goal. This grand scheme, in the opinion of the authors, began to flounder right away, as the contrast between American and Soviet economic performance became apparent to Khrushchev himself. Fursenko and Naftali do not use the new literature (Russian and Western) on Khrushchev's domestic reforms and their failure. Yet, their attention to the Soviet domestic context as a major factor explaining Khrushchev's foreign policy zigzags is laudable.

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The authors argue that Khrushchev's grand design logically explained his behavior after the downing of the U-2; if the Americans learned about Soviet military weakness (including the decision not to reach strategic parity with the U.S.), then they would refuse to make any concessions, especially in West Berlin. The double threat of GDR weakness and West German assertiveness, Fursenko and Naftali argue, triggered Khrushchev's ultimatum in the first place. Still, for all their attempts to reconstruct Khrushchev's logic, the authors come back to the lack of it. The whole affair was his improvisation. No great scheme obligated Khrushchev to behave like a brute at the Paris summit; it was rather his impossible personality. Radical shifts in Soviet behavior cannot be traced in Soviet archives, and the authors just have to surmise: "something happened" in Khrushchev's head.

Fursenko and Naftali state that the most dangerous phase of the Cold War began on May 26, 1961, when Khrushchev announced to the quiescent Presidium his decision to bluff JFK into concessions on the Berlin issue. Soviet intelligence and the Bolshakov channel to Robert Kennedy (the authors got extraordinary sources on both, including the GRU summary of RFK-Bolshakov meetings), ironically, egged Khrushchev into the ever-militant posture. Kennedy's perceived political weakness and the complex nature of the U.S. politics did not make him patient; rather they made him impatient, even mad. On June 21, after the intelligence came to the Kremlin that JFK and NATO had geared up for a protracted Berlin crisis, Khrushchev decided to encircle West Berlin with the Wall. "The decision to build the Berlin Wall was Khrushchev's alone to make," they state (375), and refer to Khrushchev's "authoritarian blindness." Still, I would side with the meticulous reconstruction and argument by Hope Harrison; she convincingly argues that Ulbricht boxed Khrushchev into taking this decision, and Fursenko and Naftali do not produce any "smoking gun" evidence to contradict this.

The book recapitulates in a smaller space the saga of the Cuban revolution and the Soviet growing involvement in it. Even here, the authors manage to produce new significant evidence in addition to *One Hell of a Gamble*, which includes the notes of GRU chief Ivan Serov at the Presidium, materials on the deployment of Soviet submarines near Cuba, and interviews with knowledgeable persons, including Raul Castro's wife. The description of the Presidium's meeting on October 22, as I have already mentioned, represents a major addition to the material presented in *One Hell of a Gamble*. It shows, in particular, that "Khrushchev was not prepared to concede the point on using tactical nuclear weapons," in case of an American attack on Cuba. (472). The material gives the impression that, but for Mikoyan's objection, the military might have obtained the directive to use "Luna" missiles, armed with nuclear warheads. This returns us to the old debate about how dangerous was the crisis, and how close it brought the world to nuclear war.

The last pages of the book contain some controversial assertions. According to Fursenko and Naftali, the observers of Khrushchev, this impetuous and erratic man, "generally missed the strategist within," ...and.... "For all the bluster, there was a consistency of goals." The Brezhnev leadership "set aside Khrushchev's complex strategy for reshaping the Cold

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War and concentrated on accumulating more strategic weapons.” (540). A complex strategy? In my opinion, it was more a reckless gambling. The authors give too much credibility (like so many authors in the past) to the thesis of “missed opportunity” before Khrushchev’s ouster. True, in the spring 1964 there was a “sea change in Soviet foreign policy,” as Khrushchev finally began to treat Kennedy as a partner, not as a bluff target. Yet, he also changed his tactics with Eisenhower in 1958-60. On the German question, Khrushchev might have had a vision of Rapallo (525), but there is no evidence whatsoever that he was prepared to sacrifice the interests of the GDR. On the contrary, the Wall made the Soviet negotiating positions much stronger. Certainly, until Brandt’s Ostpolitik, there was no chance for any kind of Soviet-West German “special relations.”

There is a tendency to pair Khrushchev off with Gorbachev as the two most preferred partners of the West during the Cold War, because they were reform-minded, and therefore better than the conservative, rigid figures. I think that in case of Khrushchev, nothing can be further from reality. Neither the U.S. leaders, nor the Soviet leadership ever regretted Khrushchev’s removal. The authors themselves recognize that Khrushchev’s brinkmanship left a long and ominous cloud on U.S.-Soviet relations. There should be no obfuscation of this fact. Khrushchev was a dangerous revisionist in international affairs, not the adversary the Americans should miss.

**Author's Response by Aleksandr Fursenko, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg**

It is an honour to receive reviews by such distinguished scholars of the Cold War. They are supportive and encouraging in spite of the fact there are sometimes serious disagreements. I can not pretend to answer all the questions posed by the reviewers and do not intend to reject the criticism. But I would like to clarify some points in my position.

First of all about access to archival materials. Owing to my long standing in the Russian academic community I really did get exclusive access to previously closed files. It was a big privilege and unique opportunity to look through earlier inaccessible documents. I tried as much as I could to open the materials not only for myself and my co-author but for other researchers as well. The main result of my efforts was the publication of Malin's notes and other documents in two volumes, *Archives of Kremlin. Presidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party*. The last

and third volume is almost finished and is to be published in the near future. Under the circumstances there are still some serious restrictions in the archives. In time they may be overcome but at the moment the situation does not look too promising.

Last year one of our most severe critics, Michael Dobbs of the *Washington Post* (see his review "Can't Verify, Can't Trust")<sup>1</sup> visited my Moscow apartment. He kindly brought a bottle of French wine. But in the whole apartment there was no bottle opener and the bottle is still laying unopened. We could not try it. In both cases it might be said we could not help it.

But seriously speaking, even such a celebrity in journalism as Michael Dobbs can not treat our book as "marred by sloppy research". As scholars and human beings we certainly were subjected to mistakes. We tried to do our best to present our readers with an adequate

*Aleksandr Fursenko, a leading historian of the Cold War and one of Russia's top specialists on U.S. history, is the chairman of the historical section of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Fursenko graduated from the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) State University in 1951, receiving his candidate's degree in 1954 (thesis topic "The Battle for the Division of China and the American 'Open Door' Doctrine in 1895-1900"). Fursenko is the co-author, with Tim Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-64 (1997) and Khrushchev's Cold War (2006). He has also written several major works on U.S. history in Russian, including The History of U.S. Foreign Policy and Diplomacy (1994), The Development of American Government (1992), and The Dictionary of American History (1997). He has also published on international oil politics at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, most notably The Battle for Oil: The Economic and Politics of International Corporate Conflict over Petroleum, 1900-1930 (1990). He became a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1987, and a full academic in 1990. Since 1996 he has been a member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences.*

<sup>1</sup> [Ed. Note] Michael Dobbs, "Can't Verify, Can't Trust," *Washington Post*, 1 February 2007, C03. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/31/AR2007013102105.html>.

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narrative. But I have to confess that there is indeed a misattribution of N.S. Khrushchev's words to Anastas Mikoyan, as noted by Dobbs. The thing is that while Mikoyan's son Sergo had an exact copy of his father's dictation of 19 January 1963 I have had only brief notes of a highly classified document. Certainly this is not an excuse but a matter of fact and my own (not Tim Naftali's) fault.

Explaining this fault I must add that certain circumstances influenced my interpretation. The dictation of 19 January 1963 took place while Khrushchev was in power and Mikoyan addressed him with full respect, using Khrushchev's patronymic - Nikita Sergeevich. Later the situation changed. After Khrushchev's dismissal, he was mentioned in Mikoyan's dictations only as Chair of Government and his behavior was evaluated more critically. The late Oleg A. Troyanovskii, then Khrushchev's assistant on foreign policy who was present at Presidium during the Cuban Missile Crises, told me several years later that Mikoyan regularly opposed the military and even Khrushchev on questions relating to nuclear weapons in Cuba. The brief notes of A.K. Serov (a member of Malin's staff in the Central Committee General Department but not GRU head Ivan Serov, as V. Zubok supposed) at the 22 October Presidium meeting supported this. In his later dictation of 26 April 1974, a long time after Khrushchev's dismissal and death, Mikoyan described Presidium discussions on nuclear missiles in Cuba. He reported that Malinovskii "irresponsibly and unconditionally supported everything" that the Chair of Government was proposing. All this brings me to conclude that there was disagreement between Mikoyan and Khrushchev at the 22 October Presidium night session. However, I have to repeat there is no excuse for my misattribution.

At the same time I can not understand the brutal tone of Dobbs review. I do appreciate Kenneth Osgood's friendly words defending our research. I don't think we deserved so severe criticism because of the above mentioned misattribution, the inexact rank of the U-2 pilot shot down over Cuba or even mixing names of ships and Soviet subs around Cuba. I am looking forward to reading Dobbs's planned book on the Cuban Missile Crises and wish him success. I do hope he will himself discover some materials in the newly opened declassified U.S. files.

There are some more questions in the reviews which need to be answered. First of all they relate to the characteristics of Khrushchev. What kind of politician was he? According to my interpretation based on numerous documents, he was rather a pragmatist than an ideologue. A few years ago we attended a discussion in the Woodrow Wilson Center on the driving forces of the Soviet policy in Cold War. Then we thought it was mainly Realpolitik. We didn't change our mind after years of further study. In fact I have become even more convinced of this. In spite of all his references to Marxism-Leninism, Khrushchev was in fact pure pragmatist. He was surrounded by some dogmatists like influential Presidium member Michael Suslov. But Khrushchev himself acted in fact in a very practical way. His behavior might be often quite unreasonable from a common sense viewpoint, but that is another question.

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Professor Hope Harrison's long time interest to the Soviet-GDR relations deserves special attention. But to my mind she is not correct in her main concept that "the tail wagged the dog". The documents do not support this conclusion. Khrushchev had to take into consideration Walter Ulbricht's complaints and permanent demands but he made his own decisions and dictated them to the GDR leader. He was not so responsive to GDR pressure as Harrison contends. Presidium materials and accounts of the Khrushchev-Ulbricht meetings clearly prove this. Never having worked with GDR archival material, I have to say that from the Soviet corner, the picture is different than what Professor Harrison has presented.

After the publication of *One Hell of a Gamble* some critics thought we had to make wider general conclusions. The same criticism was repeated by our recent reviewers. The new book *Khrushchev's Cold War* in its character has a wider approach. But from the very beginning it was consciously decided that we were going to write a narrative. We thought the best possible narrative would show our readers the whole picture of events in full measure. I am still convinced this approach was quite justified. We widened our source base as a result of using material from British and French archives. Thanks to Tim Naftali's efforts we could include much new American material and present a considerably more complicated picture of events. Thanks to him we embraced even African affairs and more about Asia, particularly as a result of his search in Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs archives.

Our reviewers mentioned the book was well written. That is to my co-author's merit with his stylish English. We have spent almost 15 years working together. It has been an enjoyable cooperation. Sometimes on some problems we faced sharp debates but usually we could find appropriate solutions. It was a unique experience to cooperate with such a young capable scholar living in a remote part of the globe. Both of us were happy and full of enthusiasm opening new and earlier unknown pages of our countries history.

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**Author's Response by Timothy Naftali, Director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum**

I wish to thank Tom Maddux for organizing this roundtable and Campbell Craig, Hope Harrison, Ken Osgood and Vlad Zubok for participating. As my colleague and friend Aleksandr Fursenko has written, it is an honor that this group has taken the time to respond to our book, *Khrushchev's Cold War*. A scholar could not hope for a better response and from better experts.

I thought I'd use Campbell Craig's excellent comments about choices we made in the structure of the book to relate the story of how we got there. This book arose from our experience writing *One Hell of a Gamble*. We used many of the same techniques to structure the narrative, but there were some changes in how we researched our second book. For *Gamble*, the vast majority of the Russian research was done by Fursenko and was then shared with me in Russian note form or, in some cases, by means of Xeroxed documents. The subject areas of the second book were so immense that Fursenko and I shared duties for doing the Russian-language research. I did the bulk of the work in the Russian foreign ministry archives and did the analysis of the Malin notes and stenographic accounts. Fursenko focused primarily on materials from the Presidential archive and the intelligence community (GRU and FSB materials). The latter archives are unfortunately closed to foreigners and to most Russian scholars.

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It was great fun to write *One Hell of a Gamble*. Nevertheless, the book raised as many questions for me as it solved. I was not satisfied that we had gotten to the bottom of why Khrushchev had put missiles in Cuba. I remember trying to sort out the Chinese angle—which really came from a few hints in KGB materials but nothing more—and choosing to use a metaphor from a favored movie of my childhood, *Murder on the Orient Express* (i.e. that there were many motives that led to the act). I also wondered to what extent the Cuban missile crisis was representative of superpower motives/behavior generally in the Cold War. I recalled the debate in U.S. foreign policy literature over its utility as a case study for generating grander theories or propositions. If epiphenomenal, then the crisis

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was of limited value as a case study. Finally, there was the question of the role of ideology. An older generation of Cold War scholars— Mel Leffler, John Lewis Gaddis, among others— had focused on the dichotomy between ideology and pragmatism. In the early post-Cold War the term “romanticism”—primarily because of the work of Vlad Zubok and Vladimir Pleshakov-- emerged as a smart variant on the role of ideas in motivating behavior, but it seemed to me that we were still stuck in a binary, either/or explanatory framework. What we needed was more data. Unlike students of U.S., British or French foreign policy, Sovietologists were not only dealing with a limited data set, but with a fundamentally different record-keeping culture that seemed to make answering those deeper questions more difficult.

This is the background to my reaction when Fursenko told me in 1997 that a collection of notes from Presidium meetings during the entire Khrushchev period existed. Made by Vladimir Malin, these handwritten notes recorded debates and decisions. Furthermore, there were even a smattering of meeting transcripts, Khrushchev employed a stenographer to record a meeting verbatim, usually whenever he was setting a new political line. The few Malin notes that Fursenko received for the Cuban crisis came to us late in the writing of *Gamble*, but were very significant. I recall getting them faxed to me in 1996 to decipher (with Fursenko's help) and then incorporate in the text. The notes we received for *Gamble* were accurate but incomplete as a record of Presidium discussions regarding the Cuban missile crisis. As we were to learn in doing the new book, there were equally significant notes from May and July 1962 that shed light on the decision and Khrushchev's whole approach to the issue. We would also learn that at the height of the crisis, there was briefly a second notetaker, Fursenko Serov.

Over the next few years Aleksandr Fursenko worked hard to get these notes processed (they were handwritten and had to be deciphered) and declassified for release in a Russian scholarly edition (which he edited and a team annotated) and for our use in the second book. This process took a lot longer than either of us anticipated in 1997. While doing that he undertook research in the Presidium archive and in the foreign ministry archive (on Egypt, primarily) and I traveled to Moscow to burrow through foreign ministry and party archival materials. Fursenko and I also added primary materials from British, French and U.S. archives. We also tried hard (and failed) to get materials from the Egyptians.

The receipt of the Malin notes determined the shape of the book. Initially we thought it would serve as a prequel to *Gamble*, providing cross-national narratives of Suez, the U-2 Affair and the Berlin crisis. Thus we might have more interesting things to say about where Cuba fit in the evolution of Moscow and Khrushchev's thinking about the world and raise some of the questions about perception and misperception that we had touched on in *Gamble*. Once the Notes came to us, it became clear to me that they told a larger and potentially more interesting story. Embedded in them was a different series of concerns than those that had typically appeared in Western narratives for those years. As Zubok noted, we noticed and then highlighted Khrushchev and the Presidium's concerns over Iraq in 1958. The notes also revealed a serious effort in 1959-60 to demilitarize the Cold War

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and the Soviet military's interest in arms control in 1955-1957. The notes not only filled in details about Khrushchev's struggle with Molotov over the direction of Soviet foreign policy in 1955, but showed how widespread support was for Khrushchev's assault on most aspects of Stalinist foreign policy. Finally, and most significantly, the Notes revealed the bargaining that lay behind Soviet foreign policymaking. Even after the failed coup by the old guard in 1957, Khrushchev was not alone at the top. Among his allies—chiefly, Anastas Mikoyan—Khrushchev faced significant opposition that influenced outcomes. The nature of the 1958 Berlin ultimatum, I believe, can only be understood in terms of internal Presidium politics.

In this way what was to be a series of international history case studies (Suez, etc.) with the Soviet side added evolved into a study of Khrushchev's foreign (and where relevant to international outcomes, domestic) policy making. We kept the Western and Third World perspectives in the book because Khrushchev could be reactive and was always making judgments about foreign intentions. We also kept them in because I believe that the internationalist framework reveals a lot about how international politics actually function. I'm not sure how one can evaluate a country's foreign policy without some analysis of its effect on others. Finally, I wanted to work through the effect that the new Russian data could have on the master narrative of the crisis-ridden middle period of the Cold War. But Craig is right in that this meant that the reader knew more than Khrushchev, or any of the actors, about what was going on. If this got too complicated, I can only blame myself. I wanted to give this structure a try and after several drafts (and a few cuts) this was the best I could do.

I want to differ a little with my friend Hope Harrison on the effect of this new data on understanding both the Berlin and Cuban crises. Regarding Berlin, the information bolsters and supplements Harrison's great work on the role that East Germany played in pushing for the Wall. Yet Fursenko's material from the Presidential archives also suggests that the decision still had to come from Moscow before the Wall could go up. More significantly, from the standpoint of international politics, the new information from the Notes shows clearly that the building of the Wall did not eliminate Khrushchev's obsession with Berlin. He expected a Berlin crisis in 1962 and this leads to the second big thing that we learned in the course of doing this book. In terms of resolving the question of why Khrushchev put the missiles in Cuba, I believe that we are closer to the mark now. In the Notes and in the foreign ministry archives (I found this material in the files relating to Berlin and Soviet-West German relations) there was some good evidence about how Khrushchev's ideas evolved in 1962. The missile decision, it seems, was more the product of balance of power considerations than of a perceived mortal threat to Fidel Castro's regime. Zubok's point about Khrushchev being impulsive is well taken, but his choices reflect a consistent world view, even in 1962. Indeed Khrushchev's "meniscus" speech in early January 1962 sets the tone for the entire year. Frustrated by the failure of his political offensive on Berlin 1961, Khrushchev laid out a strategy of using diplomatic and political pressure around the world to contain the United States. When Soviet provocations in Southeast Asia (indirectly, through the Chinese and the Pathet Lao) and in the Berlin

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corridor merely cause a firm US response, Khrushchev's frustration deepened. By the spring of 1962, the logic of Khrushchev's strategy and worldview compelled him to think of a short cut to increasing the balance of terror. Placing missiles in Cuba, imitating the U.S. nuclear ring around the Soviet empire, might just bring about U.S. respect for Soviet power. Once the Cubans accepted the missile deployment in late June 1962, Khrushchev appeared to believe that he finally had the political leverage to push for the international settlement he has been seeking since mid-1958. His foreign ministry then began what appeared to be preparation for a major demarche on removing NATO troops from West Berlin and Khrushchev himself told the outgoing West German ambassador Hans Kroll that he was planning a major world crisis in the fall in which Kennedy would either have to give in to his Berlin demands or face the likelihood of war. Khrushchev did not answer Kroll's question as to why he believed Kennedy would capitulate in November 1962 whereas he didn't in 1961, but it takes little imagination to see the Cuban missiles as the source of this confidence. As Khrushchev was hinting broadly to the West German ambassador about his plans, he was also telling high-level U.S. visitors that the USSR can now "swat your ass."

Cardinal Richelieu presented Louis XIII with a remarkable roadmap to achieving regional hegemony. Over a century later Talleyrand attempted the same for Napoleon. We can call them grand strategy though they are never quite as thoroughly worked out as one would expect. To a similar extent, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger fashioned a grand strategy to deal with the reality of nuclear weapons and the consequences of the collapse of U.S. power in Southeast Asia. But did the Soviets have a grand strategy of any kind? I agree with Zubok that Khrushchev did not have a grand strategy. But the Notes reveal consistent streams of thought about international politics that give some coherence to Khrushchev's approach that has been underplayed up to now. Khrushchev understood that the Soviet Union was far weaker than the United States. And though he did not want to provoke or initiate a nuclear war, he was prepared to take risks to preserve the Soviet empire and extend Soviet influence. He sought to do that by building a minimal nuclear deterrent and seeking some superpower disarmament, shoring up the Soviet and Eastern European economies, making new allies abroad and pushing for a settlement of the remaining questions from World War II (above all, West Berlin and the viability of Soviet-dominated East Germany). These were core objectives from 1955 and they do not seem to have changed. What changed were his tactics.

We do not present an either/or proposition about ideology and pragmatism. Ideology influenced Khrushchev's mental filters but his Marxism-Leninism did not provide a plan of action. The Presidium discussions during and after Khrushchev and Bulganin visited South Asia in 1955 illustrate how the Kremlin in Khrushchev's era juggled ideology and pragmatism. "This creates a precedent," said the Stalinist Lazar Kaganovich in opposition to a 100 million dollar aid package for the feudal and anti-progressive government of Afghanistan. Mikoyan and Malenkov, however, carried the day by accepting Khrushchev and Bulganin's recommendation that it be done. "We should work to attract Afghanistan to our side," argued Malenkov. The debate is again neatly delineated in 1959 when Khrushchev found himself caught between the anti-Communist Gamal Abdel Nasser and

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the Iraqi nationalist 'Abd al-Karim Qasim. Khrushchev knew that Nasser was not a communist but he wanted to support him, so long as he stopped arresting Arab communists and ended his campaign against Soviet ally Iraq.

I agree with Ken Osgood that we did not handle well Michael Dobb's criticisms of our research methods. When the book was about to appear, Dobbs, formerly of the *Washington Post*, called to say that he was likely going to write "something about our book" [He did not mention a review] and that he had found some serious mistakes in both the new book and *Gamble*, and would we like to respond? Both Fursenko and I tried to help—indeed I sent Dobbs some information that I had to explain a few of our assertions that he called errors. He later changed his mind about those issues, or at least chose not to include them in his bill of particulars. Unfortunately for us he did find some significant mistakes. In his response to this roundtable, Fursenko has mentioned our misuse of Mikoyan's memo for the record of January 19, 1963. By far most of the documents we used for our reconstruction of the Cuban missile crisis were either seen by both of us or our narrative was based on Fursenko's very extensive Russian-language notes from the archives. The handling of the Mikoyan document was an exception to our collaboration on the Cuban missile crisis. Since that collaboration—what Fursenko calls our laboratory—has for too long had some mystery attached to it, this fact was not readily apparent. Meanwhile, I did a poor job on pinning down the movement of Soviet submarines during the crisis. In response to these errors, Fursenko and I made significant corrections to the paperback edition of our book. Relying on Svetlana V. Savranskaya's excellent work on the role of Soviet subs in the crisis, I tried to correct the sub story. I also rewrote the relevant section of chapter 19 where we drew from the Mikoyan memcon and Fursenko signed off on the changes. There is a note in the paperback edition about these changes and despite the fact that the note is not as detailed as I would have liked, it does make clear to readers that some important things have changed from the hardcover edition.

Although some of the evidence in our book comes from Fursenko's superb work in closed sources (the account of the interrogation of Francis Gary Powers, the Presidium material on the building of the Berlin wall) most of the book—and all of its main conclusions—can be checked. Fellow scholars may not agree with our conclusions but they can see how we reached them. The Malin Notes and stenographic accounts from the Khrushchev era are published and, thanks to the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, are available in English. I do not know the current status of the foreign ministry files that I consulted, but once I complete my move to California (I still commute back and forth to D.C.) I intend to deposit my own Moscow research materials in a library.

Again I am delighted for this opportunity to respond to this roundtable. In working through the materials, both Fursenko and I were struck by how often Khrushchev chose to alter the pace of international events. I have been in the history business long enough to have my doubts about the "Great Man" theory of history but there is little doubt in my mind that though the existence of superpower tension in the 1950s and 1960s was over determined because of developments in nuclear technology and the collapse of the colonial

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world, the amplitude of those tensions reflected choices by the leaders themselves. And no one was more influential in this respect than Nikita Khrushchev.

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