

James G. Richter. *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. ix + 263 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-4814-8.



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The Khrushchev period (1953-64) is attractively self-contained for students of Soviet politics. Richter's work is not the first to use this period to test hypotheses and models about Soviet politics. His work, however, is one of the best.

Richter's interest lies in the complicated interaction of international and domestic politics. He builds upon the work of other scholars to describe the international environments of the first post-Stalin decade, the foreign policy lines of the Soviet Union and the United States, and the content of Khrushchev-era Soviet decision-making. Richter's own contributions lie in his analysis of the formation of Soviet domestic political coalitions of the period, those coalitions' requirements of the international environment; and foreign policy interests as defined by the competing coalitions.

Khrushchev-era Soviet political leaders appear in his book as real politicians, not cardboard cutouts or ideologically-salivating monsters. They are power-maximizing, policy-oriented, coalition-building actors who seek to respond to their domestic and international political environments. Their successes or failures are not pre-ordained

but rather are the products of their abilities to maneuver, to define, and to mobilize. Reading this work this reviewer could not but wish that its methods of analysis had been available to American decision-makers of the time.

The immediate post-Stalin succession struggle was Malenkov's to lose. He lost it because he built a political coalition which required a benign view of the international environment. When the imperialists did not act as Malenkov required his political acumen was shown to be shallow. His coalition elements were picked apart by his Politburo competitors and he himself fell from grace.

Khrushchev, by contrast, was more successful in grasping and keeping power because his definition of the situation, based upon his coalition's needs, did not require imperialists to cease acting like imperialists. Khrushchev would not fall, at least not for a decade, when the imperialists did not act as he wished. Nor did Khrushchev have the political need (as did Molotov, for instance) for the imperialists to behave as implacable ideologically-motivated foes. Instead the imperialists could act true to type, that is, trying to throw their

weight around but constrained by Soviet power to behave more "realistically." And it just so happened that the kind of Soviet power which constrained the imperialists was the kind which was produced by just those coalition elements that were included in Khrushchev's political base. Among them was, of course, the party apparatus, the strengthening of which would not only strengthen Khrushchev but would also re-define the party's role in post-Stalin Soviet society in ways amenable to apparatchiki themselves.

These bare descriptions of Malenkov's and Khrushchev's political strategies do not do justice to Richter's grasp of Soviet coalition politics and to show the connections among otherwise disparate domestic and international policies. Richter shows how an ability to define interests and create coalitions lay at the heart of the Soviet political process, at least during the Khrushchev period.

Khrushchev's putting together a winning coalition was no mean feat. But keeping it together is where life got interesting. It was politics as a high-wire act. Khrushchev's 1957 fall was broken by his coalition majority in the Central Committee. Khrushchev's 1964 fall went unbroken because that political base had been eroded. Erosion was not merely a matter of lack of policy success, as earlier Kremlinological models held. Erosion was a political matter of coalitions falling apart, of even skillful politicians no longer able to hold together a coalition formed at an earlier time. Political environments change. Political bases weaken. Coalitions fall apart. No surprise here to students of, say, American politics, but Richter applies this logic to Soviet politics, too.

Particularly interesting is the discussion of Khrushchev's allegedly erratic policy behavior leading to his downfall in 1964. The contradictions in his behavior were not due primarily to his alleged erratic personality (e.g., shoe-banging). Nor were they due to a clever rational bargaining strategy to keep his opponents unsure of his next

move. Richter attributes Khrushchev's erratic behavior to his scrambling to keep his unraveling political coalition together as the international environment changed from what it had been when the coalition was formed earlier. Thus, Khrushchev the politician emerges from the shadow of Khrushchev the psychological basket case or Khrushchev the superfiend playing the West like a yo-yo. It is a welcome emergence.

Throughout the book Richter is careful to state domestic -international linkage hypotheses and to evaluate the evidential support for them. He is judicious, not overstating the level of support for hypotheses. He discusses what additional evidence might be needed to clarify support for or against a given point. Far from trying to be the definitive account of the Khrushchev period, Richter is more interested in raising questions and seeking evidence to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. In the interests of clarity I would suggest boldfacing the hypotheses to make them stand out more forcefully in the text.

Does Richter's approach work? In this reviewer's judgment, decidedly yes. One comes away with a more sophisticated understanding of the Khrushchev period in particular, of Soviet politics in general, and especially of the complicated interaction of international and domestic politics.

But it does not work easily. The model of domestic -international interaction which Richter uses is a complex one. I wish Richter had given us a diagram or graphic of the model. I would have referred back to it often to keep from getting lost or, when lost, used it as a road map for getting back on track.

How well will Richter's work hold up under the anticipated barrage of opening Soviet archives? Richter's primary source materials are public speeches of the Kremlin leaders. If and when Khrushchev's and other leaders' private papers become available Richter may have to change specific details of action and perhaps even specific elements of coalition politics. But the

overall framework should remain quite useful for the analysis of new material.

The larger danger, I think, lies in Richter's belief that the Politburo of the Khrushchev era had a very high degree of functional autonomy. Richter follows the lead of T.H. Rigby in characterizing the Soviet Union as a "mono-organizational society." Neither totalitarian nor pluralistic, Rigby's approach is a conceptually safe half-way house. It allows Richter to get on with his analysis without having to worry too much about Politburo members being beholden to extra-Politburo influence. Had Richter chosen a more pluralistic model of Politburo decision-making the scope of his study would have been expanded considerably and perhaps unmanageably. But it is not beyond the realm of possibility that opening archives may shed new light on, and support for, the more pluralistic interpretation of the Politburo. Richter's work would then probably need revision.

Not for undergraduates, *Khrushchev's Double Bind* is an important contribution to both political science and Soviet area studies.

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